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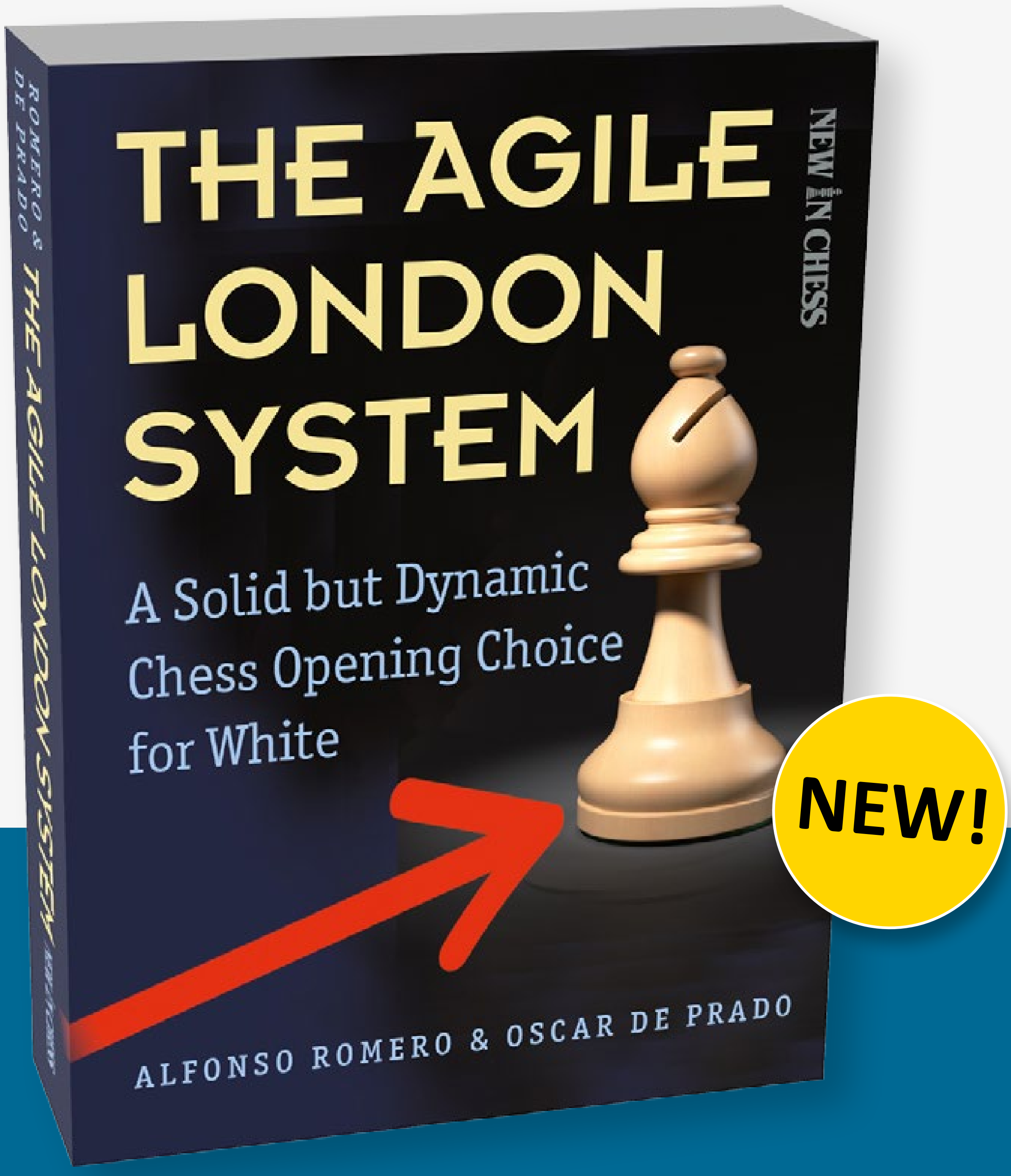
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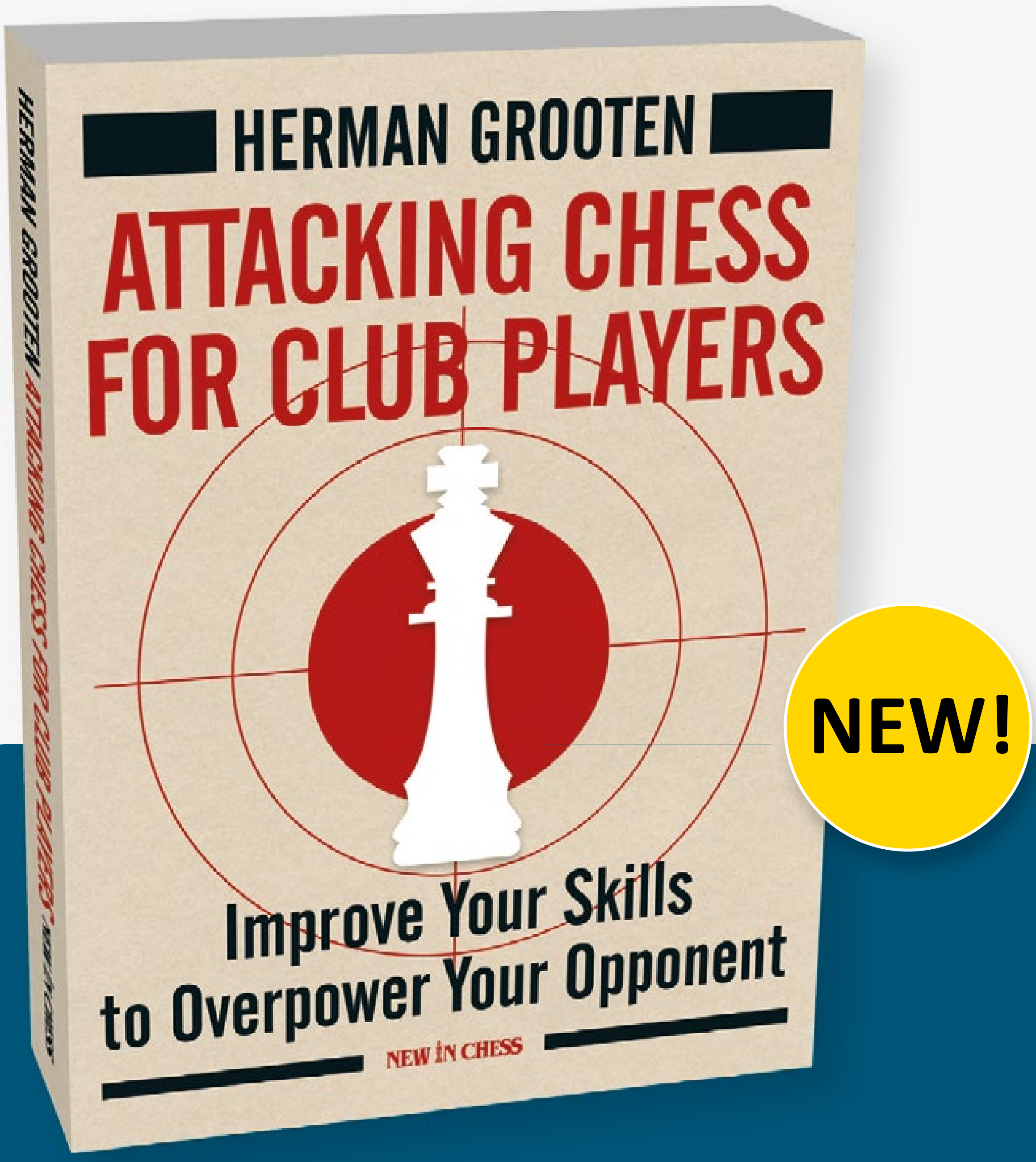
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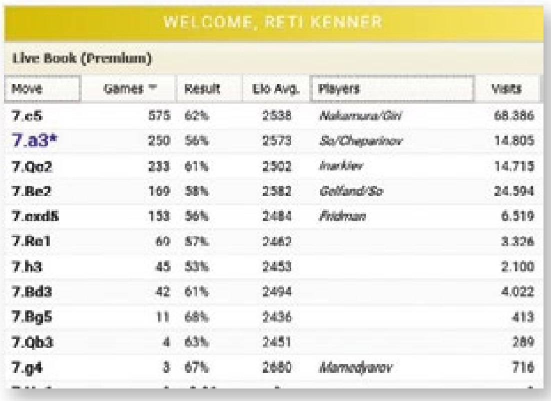

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7.cxd5	153	56%	2484	Fridman	6.519
7.Re1	60	57%	2462		3.326
7.h3	45	53%	2453		2.100
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Francis Joseph Lee (left) with George Gossip (New York 1893) (courtesy Cleveland Public Library Special Collections). From *Joseph Henry Blackburne* by Tim Harding.

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5

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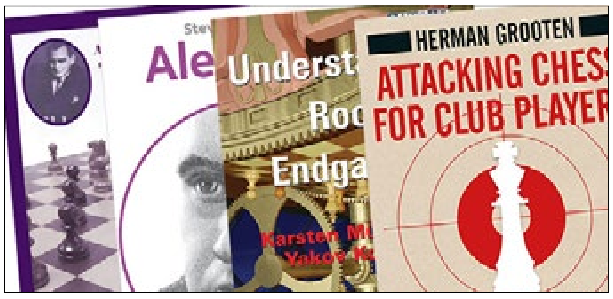

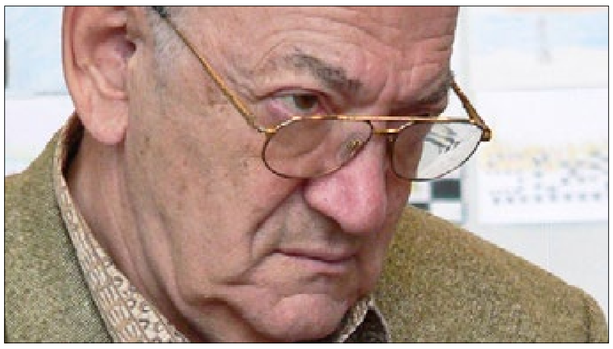

'As he grew older he became more withdrawn, and whenever a conversation took a turn away from chess, he would behave like a child dragged away from a sandpit. Towards the end of his life this took on ever more radical forms. He simply could not speak about anything else.' – *Genna Sosonko on Viktor Kortchnoi*

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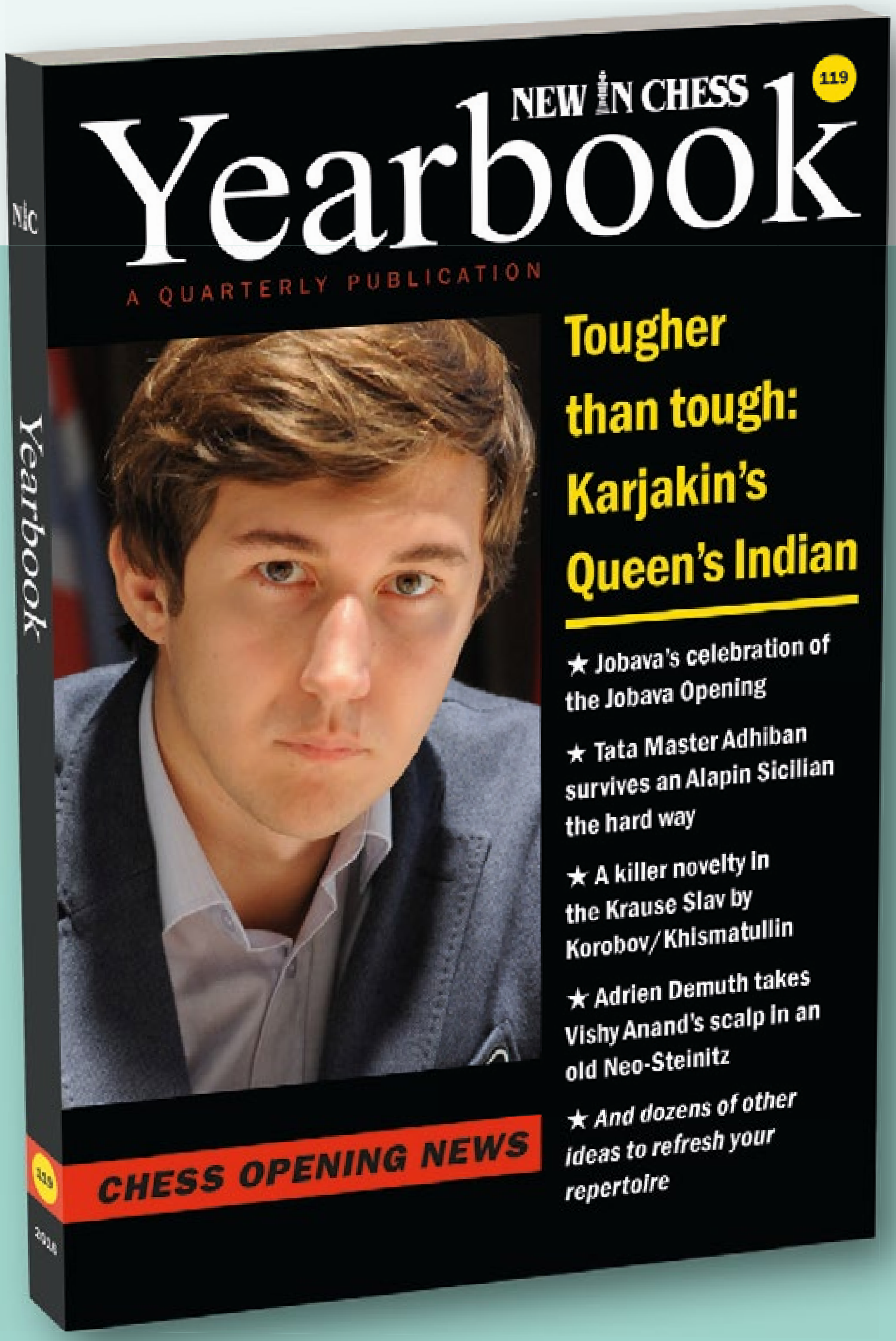
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- What is Christian Bauer’s way to get active with black against 1.b3?
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- And much more

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Incomparable

The first time I interviewed Viktor Kortchnoi was in Tilburg in 1988. As a novice I couldn't believe my luck that he so generously took his time to answer all my questions. When at some point his wife Petra hinted that she wouldn't mind going for dinner, he explained that he wanted his interview to be at least as long as that of Ljubomir Ljubojevic, which had appeared in a recent issue of New In Chess.

Perhaps for that purpose, he even granted me a second session. In his small hotel room he sat on a chair, while I faced him from the edge of the bed with little space between us. All the while I was mustering courage to ask a question I had not dared ask so far. And then it came out. Did he know, when he was trying to get his first wife and son out of the Soviet Union, that the moment they joined him in the West he would divorce her?

Saying that the silence that followed was painful is an understatement. But something extraordinary happened. As if wrestling with himself, Kortchnoi forced himself to answer, and a long drawn-out, hesitating hmmmmmm ended in an abrupt yes.

'All the while I was mustering courage to ask a question I had not dared ask so far. And then it came out.'

I've often thought back to that moment when it proved physically impossible for Kortchnoi not to speak the truth. He could be harshly critical of others, but he abided by the same rules when judging himself. In our last interview, in 2011, he admitted that perhaps one reason why he was so tough on young players was jealousy, because they played so much better than him at that age. And when he spoke disparagingly about Botvinnik's cultural ignorance, he readily agreed that his own academic career had not really been something to boast about either.

In this issue, we pay tribute to the incomparable Viktor Kortchnoi, with Genna Sosonko's article as the centrepiece.

In the days after the sad news of Kortchnoi's death had reached us, several people asked me if Genna had already started writing. Of course he had, and the result is everything we (and Kortchnoi) could have hoped for: a highly personal memoir, full of insights and revelations. Certainly not a eulogy, but an unvarnished testimonial by one of the persons who knew him best.

Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam
Editor-in-Chief

Sanderson Lincoln Pavilion

Chessie & Hershel

What do you get when you mix the Arizona town of Carefree, 25 tons of sand and a world renowned sculptor? The answer is a jaw-dropping, life-sized sand sculpture of a chess match between an elephant named Chessie Trunkston, and a field mouse named Hershel Higginbottom.

The amazingly detailed masterpiece is the work of the internationally acclaimed American sculptor Ray Villafane, who with his fellow artist and colleague, Sue Beatrice, collaborated together on the sand sculpture now on display under the Sanderson Lincoln Pavilion in downtown Carefree for tourists and residents to marvel at through the long summer months June to August.

The piece has received overwhelming interest in the local media as well as gone viral with Villafane's thousands of Facebook followers who in the 24 hours after it was unveiled had over 1.6 million views, 19,000 shares and over 600 comments ranging from name recommendations to stories about the relationship between the mouse winning the game and stumping the life-size opponent.

The small Arizona town has been so overwhelmed by the public and media reaction to the sand sculpture match-up between Chessie and Hershel that there's now a live video feed and a limerick competition available at carefree.org. ■

Chessboard of the World

It's a tragic crisis we all watched unfold daily in the news media: thousands of refugees risking their lives by travelling across the Mediterranean from Turkey into Greece in an attempt to settle deeper into Europe to avoid their homeland conflicts. And the evidence of their perilous journey was left behind on the beaches for all to see, as countless orange life preservers littered the shores of Lesbos and other Greek islands. But rather than leave the life jackets to decompose in a landfill, a local artist in conjunction with students from the University of Aegean repurposed the once vital life-saving devices into a game that represents refugees' strategy, risk, and sacrifice: chess.

Life vests recycled into the Chessboard of the World.

'It's a metaphor for the human struggle for survival, for a better life, and a prosperous future,' said Maria Chatziantoniou, a member of the environment teaching staff at the University of Aegean, in the *TakePart.com* news site.

With more than 300 life jackets and three inflatable boats sitting on the beach, artist Fereniki Tsamparli had the brainwave of repurposing them into a giant chess set and board, as a symbolic tribute to one of the 'greatest migrations of humankind'. Along with Chatziantoniou and fifty of her students, they set about the task of turning the visible debris of survival into a statement of hope for the future, with an outdoor installation piece named 'Chessboard of the World'.

Howzmate!

Experts such as Nigel Short and Peter Svidler tell us that chess and cricket go together very well. They will be delighted by the story of the former youth chess champion-turned-cricketer, Yuzvendra Chahal.

'Chess helps me plot the opposition batsman's dismissal. I try to be one step ahead of the batsman, especially in Twenty20 cricket where the bowler has to think on his feet,' the 25-year-old leg break bowler disclosed during an interview for *The Times of India*.

From the age of 7, chess and cricket were the dual pursuits of the young Chahal. He started to progress well in age-group chess tournaments and turned his focus on making it big on the chessboard. He became the under-12 national chess champion, then went on to represent India at the Asian and World Youth Chess Championships.

But his promising chess career was stopped dead in its tracks when he couldn't attract any sponsors, and chess became more of a hobby for Chahal (who has a current FIDE rating of 1946), as he turned his attention to his other pursuit of cricket, where he went on to make the grade there and then some.

And the Royal Challengers bowler, who has represented India at both chess and cricket – the one player to do so – has had such a standout season for his team in the Indian Premier League, that many pundits are beginning to suggest that he could well be picked soon to play for India at Test level, the pinnacle of international cricket.

Just imagine Yuzvendra Chahal winning a chess game!

To be young, gifted and titled

In giving up chess for cricket, Yuzvendra Chahal may well have noted the wise words of his hero Vishy Anand, who once observed that 'Nowadays, when you're not a grandmaster at 14, you can forget about it.' With those words in mind, we segue from one former Indian prodigy to a new one – and this one is already following Anand's sage advice. At the tender age of just 10 years, 10 months and 19 days, R Praggnanandhaa has become the youngest IM in chess history. The new Indian wunderkind – who, like Anand, also comes from Chennai – scored his third IM norm and got his rating over 2400 at the KIIT International Chess Festival in Bhubaneswar, India. And when he finally got back home, he just plonked himself on his favourite spot on the couch to watch cartoons on television. 'Just like any other 10-year-old,' sighed his father Rameshbabu in *The Indian Express*.

R Praggnanandhaa is eyeing Sergey Karjakin's world record.

Many believe that, with the right coaching and sponsorship, he could be on a trajectory to surpass Sergey Karjakin's long-standing record of being the youngest GM in history (12 years and 7 months). The countdown has started!

5, 4, 3, 2, 1....

Thunderbirds are go! Readers from a certain generation will fondly remember the excitement of the cult 1960s British sci-fi series *Thunderbirds*, created by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson. And what with the world in permanent crisis today, wouldn't it be nice if we could call International Rescue?

Last year was a landmark year for Thunderbirds as it celebrated its 50th anniversary. There was a new animated version of the iconic kids show as the series had a makeover, and the franchise has followed this up by marketing more memorabilia: now you can take your favourite Thunderbirds machine and character into battle with a new limited edition Thunderbirds Chess Set!

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You can defend your King, Jeff Tracy, using all the assets of International Rescue, with Lady Penelope taking her place as the Queen, the Tracy boys serving as the pawns, and Thunderbirds 1, 2, and 3 functioning as the Rooks, Knights and Bishops respectively. And according to the company promoting it, you don't even need to be Brains to play chess!

60 going on 70

Hailed by many as the chess journalist's chess journalist, octogenarian chess writer and author Leonard Barden has broken a most remarkable world record. From his landmark London *Evening Standard* column of June 30, 2016, Barden writes: 'Today's puzzle marks a record 60 years of the *Evening Standard* chess feature, the longest running daily column on any subject by a single individual in the history of journalism. In the 1970s a strike by printers meant that chess notation had to replace the diagrams, yet still not a day has been missed since June 1956. If you are one of the faithful readers who have followed *Evening Standard* chess for years or even decades, thank you for your loyal support. Now on to the 70 year mark...' A historic landmark.

Leonard Barden: a historic landmark.

And that's not all. Apart from the *Evening Standard*, Barden has also written a Saturday column for *The Guardian* for over 60 years and in *The Financial Times* for 42 years.

Not the smartest guy in the cell

Alex Gibney's wonderful award-winning 2006 documentary *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*, chronicles the meteoric rise and spectacular fall of the Houston, Texas-based energy firm. The principle players in this sordid drama of Enron are subsequently caught, and put on trial for pillaging their company and devaluing its stock, leaving thousands of employees, pensioners and investors holding the bag while they absconded with millions.

One of the main key players in this outrageous scandal was their chief financial officer Andrew Fastow, the man credited with devising one of the most complex web of clever off-balance sheet instruments at Enron that led to the most egregious corporate malefactors in American history. Like his fellow conspirators, in 2004 Fastow was convicted, and served a 6-year jail sentence to be followed by two years of probation.

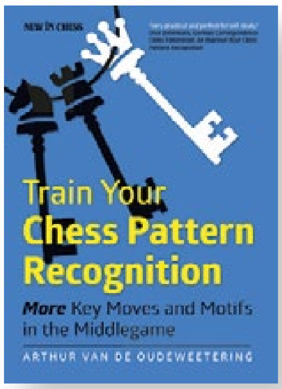
Now back at liberty again, we were intrigued to discover that Fastow was recently in the Netherlands to give a lecture on ethics in business at Maastricht University that was attended by some 650 students and alumni. Yes, you have to laugh, ethics of all things – and even Fastow took it with more than a tinge of irony, by admitting in an interview for the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, that 'Inviting me to speak about ethics is like inviting Kim Kardashian to speak about chastity.'

Serving a 6-year sentence, Andrew Fastow played 'a lot of chess'.

In the interview, Fastow said he killed time behind prison bars by 'Reading books, solving puzzles and playing chess. A lot of chess.' The former 2000 CFO of the Year-turned-convict discovered that there were many excellent chess players in prison. 'Some have been playing for 25 years, every day. They are good, very good, I could not compete with them.'

We're not really surprised about this, Mr. Fastow, as we regularly receive letters from inmates and send out many NIC subscriptions to prisons around the world. ■

NEW IN CHESS bestsellers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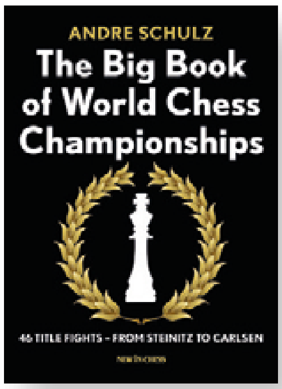
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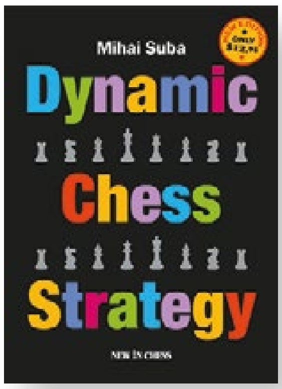
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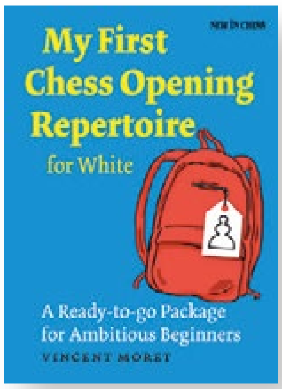
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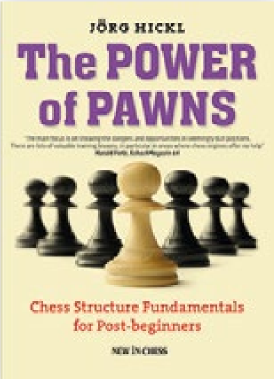
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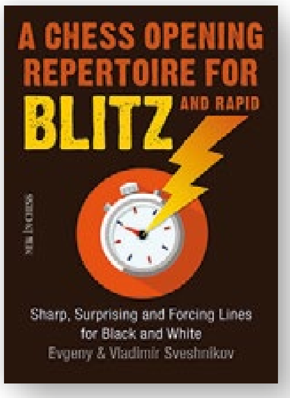
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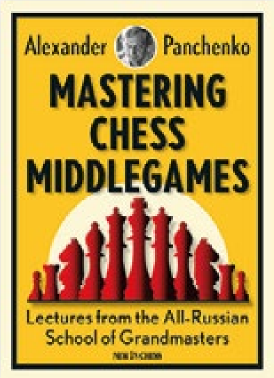
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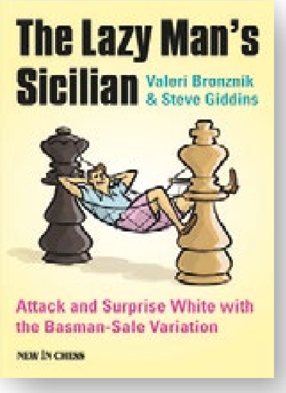
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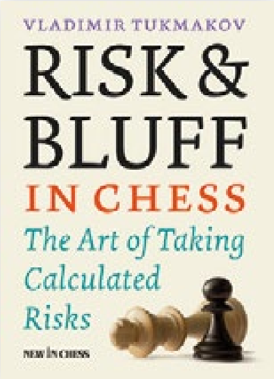
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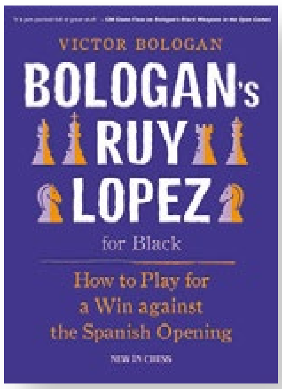
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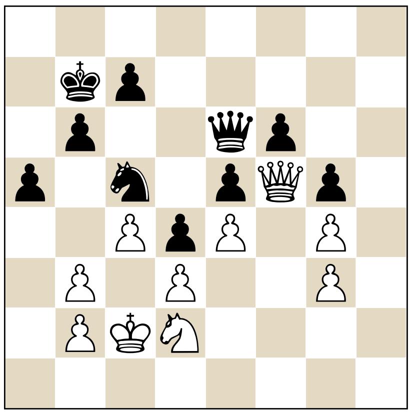
Capa's love for baseball

Regarding Capablanca and baseball (New In Chess 2016/4 p.8) – he attended Columbia University from 1906-1908. He played on the freshman baseball team in 1907 as the regular second baseman as a check of the *Columbia Spectator* daily newspaper will attest. The freshman baseball team lost more games than they won but playing against the University of Pennsylvania freshman team (a very good team incidentally), Capablanca hit a triple (a rare mention to any Columbia freshman player accomplishment in the university newspaper). In 1908 Capablanca tried out for the varsity team but did not make the squad – perhaps due to a shoulder injury. That same year he dropped out of the university with poor grades and the rest, from a chessic standpoint, is well-known history. His love for the game remained strong; in 1910, he organized and led a semi-professional baseball team based in Park Ridge, New Jersey, that was mentioned in at least three short articles in New York City newspapers in July of that year.

Ed Tassinari
Scarsdale, NY, USA

Winning knight ending

I very much enjoyed Jan Timman's endgame article in New In Chess 2016/3, however there appears to be an error in the analysis to Fressinet-L'Ami, Reykjavik 2015.



Fressinet-L'Ami
Reykjavik 2015
position after 47...♔b7

Here Timman claims White can hold the draw with 48.b4! axb4 49.♘b3, but Black should instead play 48...♕xf5 49.gxf5 ♘a6!, with a winning knight ending. Clearly, 50.bxa5 ♘b4+ 51.♔d1 ♘xd3 52.axb6 ♔xb6 is a simple win so White has to play 50.♘f3 (50.♘f1 leads to the same continuation) 50...♘xb4+ 51.♔d2 ♔c6 52.♘h2 ♔d6 53.♘g4 ♔e7. White now has to play 54.b3 to prevent ...a4, but after 54...c6 55.♘f2 b5 56.♔c1 ♘a2+ followed by ...♘c3 it is all over.

John-Paul Fenwick
Melbourne, Australia

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Musical analogies

I thought I'd pen a tongue and cheek view of the different forms of chess using musical analogies.

Correspondence via mail or email is a magnificent symphony of Brucknerian or Mahlerian proportion and complexity. Unfortunately, some gripe the works are too damned long and hard to complete.

Old classical at 40 moves in 2½ hours and 16 moves in one hour after that is a grand symphony in the manner of Beethoven, Schubert, Dvořák and Sibelius. Unbelievably, some think classical music belongs to the past. Philistines!

Current classical at 40 moves in 90 minutes plus 30 second increment and 30 minutes after that is a 1930s swing session with Count Basie and Duke Ellington, a 1940s Big Band set with Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman, or modern pianistic rhythms a la Bill Evans and Dave Brubeck. Still, there are some who don't feel the unique rhythms, the complex melodies let alone the underlying harmonies and declare jazz just too slow and boring. They have no soul, man.

Action chess at 30 minutes Sudden Death is folk music with engaging, but simpler melodies than its sophisticated city cousins, classical and jazz. The tune can be catchy or melancholy, the lyrics soul stirring, but it's just a poor, wayfaring stranger come and gone.

Blitz at 5 minutes with a 3 sec delay is pop music with the simplest of melodies, a very repetitive base line, only a rare glimpse of harmony and with endings that are rushed and unmemorable. Appreciated by the masses who don't take music scholarship seriously, or those who like their music in the background. Listenable, perhaps even toe-tapping when the rhythm is good, turn-the-dial, embarrassingly awful when it's bad.

Bullet at 1 minute is gangsta rap performed by those who should be incarcerated for pushing speed to youngsters.

Robert J. Rasmussen
Denver, CO, USA

COLOPHON

PUBLISHER: Allard Hoogland
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:
Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam
HONORARY EDITOR:
Jan Timman
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Anish Giri
EDITORS: Peter Boel, René Olthof
ART-DIRECTION: Jan Scholtus
PRODUCTION: Joop de Groot
TRANSLATORS: Ken Neat, Piet Verhagen
SALES AND ADVERTISING: Remmelt Otten

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Champions of Longevity

When Viktor Kortchnoi died recently, he was lionized for his achievements and his longevity. His longevity, sustained by a burning competitive spirit that allowed him to still be ranked No. 85 in the world when he was 75, was almost unsurpassed. Almost, but not quite.

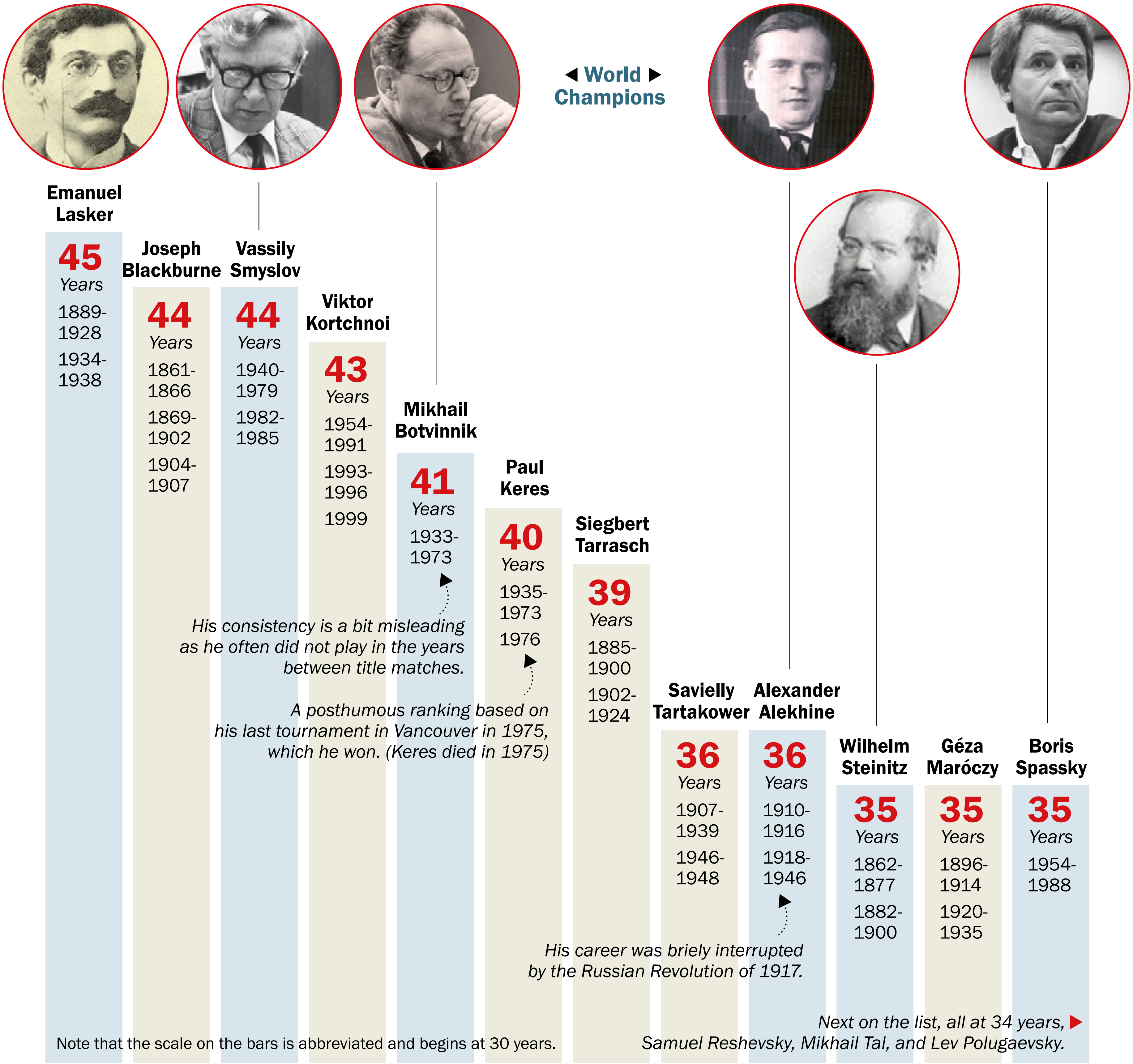
Jeff Sonas of Chessmetrics has done an analysis using data he has compiled back to 1843 along with the World Chess Federation's ratings (which have only existed since 1970) to create a list of the players with the greatest longevity at the top of the game. Any year in which a player was ranked in the top 20, even once, is included.*

It does not come as a surprise that Emanuel Lasker, the second World Champion, heads the list, as his performances in the 1935 Moscow (third place) and 1936 Nottingham (tied for seventh) tournaments, which both had world-class fields, were extraordinary for a player in his late 60s.

Kortchnoi's place at No. 4 seems pretty secure. As Sonas noted in an email, «It'll be a while until anyone breaks into the top ten of the summary list! Either it would take (Garry) Kasparov unretiring and then being in the top 20 for six years, or (Boris) Gelfand/ (Viswanathan) Anand staying in the top 20 for another decade or so.»

DYLAN LOEB McCLAIN

Number of years ranked in the top 20 in the world



His consistency is a bit misleading as he often did not play in the years between title matches.

A posthumous ranking based on his last tournament in Vancouver in 1975, which he won. (Keres died in 1975)

His career was briely interrupted by the Russian Revolution of 1917.

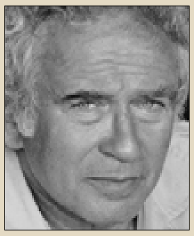
Next on the list, all at 34 years, Samuel Reshevsky, Mikhail Tal, and Lev Polugaevsky. ►

Note that the scale on the bars is abbreviated and begins at 30 years.

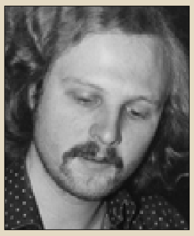
*Only standard ratings were used, not rapid or blitz.

Fair & Square

Chris Depasquale: 'The gods must have some major skirmish about to take place as they have recruited to their ranks two of the greatest fighters of all time. First Muhammad Ali and then, three days later came Viktor Kortchnoi.'
(In his weekly column for The Age)



Norman Mailer: 'In chess, no concept had once been more firmly established than control of the centre, and for much the same reason as boxing – it gave mobility for attack by the left or the right. Later, a revolution came to chess, and new masters argued that if one occupied the centre too early, weaknesses were created as well as strengths. It was better to invade the centre after the opponent was committed. Of course with such a strategy you had to be resourceful in a cramped space. Tactical brilliance was essential at every step. Was that not exactly what Ali had accomplished?'
(From his book The Fight, on the Muhammad Ali versus George Foreman 1974 fight in Zaire, known as the 'Rumble in the Jungle')

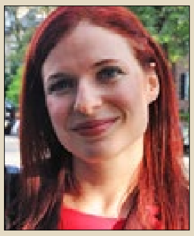


Tony Miles: 'Possibly with the exception of Karpov, everybody gets into a bad position once in a while, so that's not a reason at all to simply lose them. You also have to find a way to save lost positions and try to win them. If possible.'

Mikhail Botvinnik: 'If you want to play strong chess then you have to keep learning throughout your whole life.'

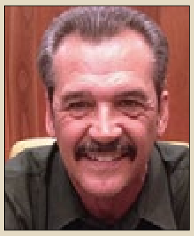
Boris Gelfand: 'Chess history is full of big mistakes made after move 41 or 42.'
(In his new book Positional Decision Making in Chess)

Viktor Kortchnoi: 'I fear only the dentist.'
(Interviewed by Gavin Young from the Observer, on the eve of the 1978 World Championship match in Baguio City)



Jennifer Shahade: 'Chess is not relaxing; it's stressful even if you win.'

Sergey Tiviakov: 'Women use less plans, less logical thinking and tend to rely on concrete move-by-move play.'
(The Dutch GM during his debut in the commentators booth during the recent Gashimov Memorial)



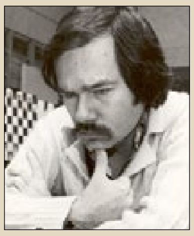
Ron Guidry: 'In both baseball and chess, you are always looking ahead and cannot afford to underestimate your opponent.'
(The Hall of Fame left-handed pitcher)

Levon Aronian: 'You can afford to calculate in the opening and middlegame, the later part of the game is all intuition.'
(On playing rapid chess)

Viktor Kortchnoi: 'How many times do I have to beat him before they stop calling him a genius?'
(On his lifetime score of 13-4 against Mikhail Tal)

Sir Stuart Milner-Barry: 'Like playing a tournament game every day for five and a half years.'
(In his forward to The Best Games of C.H.O'D Alexander, on working at Bletchley Park during WW II breaking the German Enigma codes)

Frank J. Marshall: 'When the result was announced, the crowd let out a terrific roar. At first I thought they were after my blood for defeating their idol and asked for an escort to my hotel. It turned out, however, that the good Cubans were just showing their sportsmanship and were cheering me!'
(In his autobiography, describing the scene after he beat José Raul Capablanca at Havana 1913 to win first place ahead of his rival in his hometown)



Walter Browne: 'Chess is the most creative, fascinating and challenging game there is; and the most exciting, spine-tingling form of chess is Blitz.'
(In 1988 on page 1 of the first issue of his magazine Blitz Chess)

LENNART OOTES

The Paris leg of the Grand Chess Tour was held in Maison de la Chimie, where tickets for all sessions sold out quickly.

The swings of chess in the fast lane

DIRK JAN TEN GEUZENDAM

NEW IN CHESS

The splendid 15th-century playing room in the Leuven Town Hall was also packed to capacity every day.

LENNART OOTES

Hikaru Nakamura and Magnus Carlsen were the overall winners in Paris and Leuven.

The 2016 Grand Chess Tour kicked off with two back-to-back rapid and blitz spectacles in Paris and Leuven. In the French capital, at the stylish Maison de la Chimie, Hikaru Nakamura showed that speed remains one of his trumps, while Magnus Carlsen retaliated in the 15th-century Leuven Town Hall, one of Belgium's most splendid buildings. A grand total of 270 encounters between 10 of the best players around offered a mixed bag of riveting chess, dramatic collapses and silly blunders. Within a fortnight, Vladimir Kramnik saw his blitz rating drop by 121 points. At the other end of the spectrum, Fabiano Caruana patched up his blitz image by gaining a whopping 128 points.

Ten minutes after the end of the last round of the Leuven leg of the Grand Chess Tour, Garry Kasparov walks into the players' room on the third floor of the gothic Town Hall. The 13th World Champion had been present two weeks ago at the start in Paris, and now he's come back to Europe to thank his friend Jan Callewaert, the head of the Your Next Move foundation, for his contribution to the Grand Chess Tour. Kasparov is wearing a GCT jacket and he's in a good mood. He's happy with the new events that, together with the Sinquefield Cup in August and the London Chess Classic in December, constitute the 2016 Grand Chess Tour cycle. But there's always room for improvement, and he wants to know what changes the players would like to see next year if, as is generally expected, Paris and Leuven remain part of the tour.

One change is suggested by Kasparov himself. This time, five rapid games were played on the first day and four on the second, a taxing schedule, as five or six hours of rapid play is much tougher than the same amount of time spent on one classical game. Wouldn't it be better to have three days with three rounds each? Most of the players present agree, and Kasparov promises that they'll make sure to add an extra day.

Anything else that should be changed? Maxime Vachier-Lagrave thinks and says that he wouldn't mind if the breaks between the blitz games were shorter, so that your rhythm is not interrupted and you stay in the flow. I see the jaws of some of his colleagues drop and their eyebrows rise. They feel that half an hour per blitz round is already quite stressful. Fortunately for them, Maurice Ashley of the St. Louis commentary team comes to the rescue explaining that the technicians and commentators really need that time to set up for the next round and tell the online audience what has happened in all the games.

The need to inform the spectators properly, so that they can digest what is happening and don't drown in an avalanche of games, leads to a brief discussion on whether the number of games on stage should be reduced. Anish Giri refers to the Amber tournaments in Monaco, where the rounds were split in two sessions of three games each. And Kasparov remembers the Immopar Trophies in Paris in the early 1990s, where there would be only one game on stage, a luxury that allowed the fans to concentrate even better. Everyone seems to agree that, for the viewers, less is certainly more, but you would need a lot more time if all the games of a round were not played simultaneously.

Kasparov's request to the players to take part in the evaluation is indicative of his commitment to the Grand Chess Tour. He wants to see this circuit of top-level tournaments grow and expand. The GCT has to stand for excellence, with the best conditions for players, spectators and the people that support the tour. After

NEW IN CHESS

Garry Kasparov exchanges ideas for next year with Anish Giri, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Magnus Carlsen. The 13th World Champion returned to Europe to attend the closing of the Leuven leg of the Grand Chess Tour.

these first two new experiences it is clear that they are on their way, but a lot of work is still to be done.

The dream of the Grand Chess Tour suffered a serious blow when, in the first week of this year, Norway Chess announced that they pulled out and would go their own way. Suddenly the Tour was reduced to two tournaments, St. Louis and London, which didn't sound like much of a tour anymore.

In Leuven, Michael Khodarkovsky, the President of the Kasparov Foundation, told me that the shock had been short-lived. Already by the end of January the two new legs had more or less been secured, using personal contacts and sponsor agencies. They got in touch with Colliers International, a global commercial real estate company, who were instrumental in finding the Maison de la Chimie as a venue. And once Colliers International had become an affiliate of the GCT, they brought in Vivendi and their subsidiary Daily Motion, who took care of the daily broadcasts in Paris. In Leuven, their man was Jan Callewaert, who had also been on Kasparov's ticket for the 2014 FIDE presidential elections. He involved his Your Next Move foundation and found local sponsors to secure the second leg.

On a slightly cynical note, both new events (Leuven being quite close to the Belgian capital Brussels) ended up in places in Europe that were hit hardest by terrorism recently, which not only required security measures, but also left both tournaments vulnerable. During the Your Next Move leg, the terror threat level in Belgium was 3. Had it been raised to 4, all public events in the country would have been cancelled. Actually, on my way to Leuven, my train was delayed, because Antwerp Central Station had been temporarily evacuated after a bomb scare.

LENNART OOTES

No question where they are. The participants in Paris pose for a group photo in the roof garden of the Vivendi headquarters with the Arc de Triomphe in the background. (L. to r.) Wesley So, Veselin Topalov, Hikaru Nakamura, Anish Giri, Magnus Carlsen, Laurent Fressinet, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Vladimir Kramnik, Fabiano Caruana and Levon Aronian.

In contrast to the classical tournaments in St. Louis and London, these two new members of the GCT opted for rapid and blitz tournaments. Such events are obviously shorter and less costly, but according to Khodarkovsky they should not be seen as a concession to time and financial constraints, but rather as the implementation of a plan they had had ever since the Grand Chess Tour was founded. Ideally, the Tour will consist of two rapid and blitz events and three or four classical tournaments. Finding one or two additional classical tournaments is the goal for 2017.

The aim to integrate various time-controls in one competition also seems in line with Kasparov's old wish (as described in his FIDE presidential programme) to have a rating system that calculates all games and combines classical chess, rapid and blitz. This wish is still very much alive, and more news should be expected by the end of this year.

Magnus Carlsen's decision not to commit himself to the entire tour but only to Paris and Leuven wasn't seen as a huge problem either. In the year of the World Championship match, Khodarkovsky thought it was only logical that the Norwegian knew his priorities. Interestingly, at the end of Leuven it was rumoured that Carlsen might be available for London after all, in which case the organizers may have to speak to their wild card, Mickey Adams, and compensate him for giving up his spot. But even if he played, Carlsen (who is essentially leading in the overall standings after two legs) could still not win the overall GCT, as you have to take part in both classical events to be eligible for that honour.

The events in Paris and Leuven were a feast for anyone who had the privilege to watch the players live or in the excellent broadcasts online, even though in both cases it was impossible to follow all the games (which in fact was a problem for the players themselves as well). What cannot be ignored, however, was the fluctuating level of play, which is also reflected in the relatively low final scores of the winners. Literally pages could be filled with blunders, one-move mistakes and dropped pieces.

But of course there were also moments of delight.

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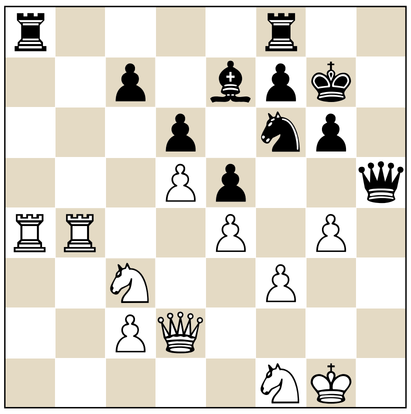
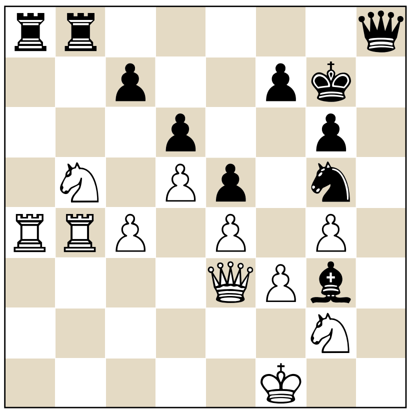


Topalov-Carlsen
Paris rapid 2016(6)
position after 33.g4

Following the game in the press room, Carlsen's second Peter Heine Nielsen noticed that the computers indicated 33...♕h8!. This looks completely wrong at first sight. While putting the queen in the corner is quite common, this is always in connection with the long diagonal. Here, however, it combines attacking via the h-file with the possibility of playing ...♖fb8, as well as – maybe even more serious – preparing ...♘h7 to attack on the kingside. Nielsen thought: It is beautiful and logical, but it also feels impossible for a human to play. Yet after a short think Carlsen uncorked it!

33...♕h8!! 34.♘b5 ♘h7! 35.♕h2 ♖fb8 Excellent coordination. **36.c4 ♕d8** Now threatening ...♘g5. **37.♘e3 ♗g5!?** 37...♘g5 was also strong. **38.♕e2 ♗f4 39.♘g2 ♗g3 40.♕e3 ♘g5 41.♔f1 ♕h8**



And with Black having completely fulfilled the concept of ...♕h8 and activated his pieces to optimum squares, the white position collapsed and Topalov resigned.

Carlsen's start had been less auspicious. In the first round, he lost on time against Wesley So in a winning position. The Norwegian accepted his bad time management with a smile, but in hindsight he may have concluded that if he had won this game, he would also have won the combined standings in Paris. He scored half a point less than Nakamura in the rapid (which was counted double) and tied with the American for first in the blitz. Here Carlsen shocked his fans by losing four of his nine games on the second blitz day. 'A meltdown', as he put it.

Nakamura, the overall winner in Paris, started Leuven with a 'meltdown', losing his first three rapid games, a cold shower that he never recovered from.

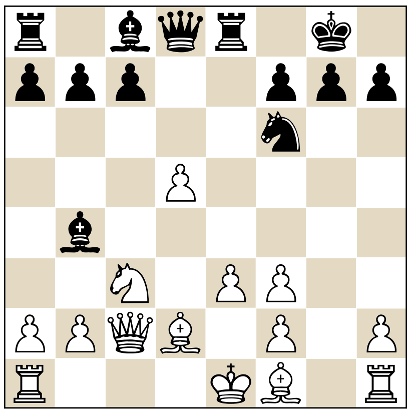
Between Paris and Leuven there was a three-day break. Most of the players travelled to Belgium by coach to spend the free days there, but not all of them. Parisian MVL preferred to stay at home and former-Parisian Kramnik visited friends. Magnus Carlsen had an entirely different plan. It had always been his wish to see Wijk aan Zee in summer, so the World Champion made a small detour to experience the difference and enjoy the beach of the seaside resort with more attractive temperatures.

Carlsen clearly enjoyed his excursion to Wijk aan Zee, but he wasn't too convincing on the opening day in Leuven. Following two draws and a win against Aronian, he lost an eventful game against Caruana. And then, in the final rapid game of the day, this happened.

NI 27.4 – D38
Hikaru Nakamura
Magnus Carlsen
Leuven rapid 2016 (5)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♕a4+ ♘c6 6.e3 0-0 7.♕c2 ♖e8 8.♗d2 e5 9.dxe5

♘xe5 10.cxd5 ♘xf3+ 11.gxf3



11...♘xd5? Played by the World Champion, but it does lose a piece without any complications. **12.♘xd5 ♕xd5 13.♗xb4 ♕xf3 14.♖g1 ♗f5 15.♕e2 ♕e4 16.♗c3 ♗g6 17.♕c4** 1-0.

LENNART OOTES

Hikaru Nakamura: happy in Paris, annoyed with his play in Leuven.

Carlsen quickly left the building, but returned with a mission. The next day he essentially decided Leuven in his favour when he won all his four rapid games, downing Topalov, Giri, Anand and Kramnik, one after the other. A strong start on the final blitz day (5 from 6) took away the last doubts. Still, when he lost to Giri in Round 7 that day and drew against So in Round 8, he knew that he had to win his last blitz game, against Nakamura, to retain his first place in the blitz world rankings. But that game was drawn and Carlsen had to relinquish his top spot to China's Ding Liren. In two weeks the World Champion had spilled 39.9 points of his blitz rating; three more than he could afford.

Many of the players saw their ratings change dramatically. One reason is the relative inaccuracy of the ratings for rapid and blitz chess, but in Vladimir Kramnik's case it was just a matter of horribly bad form. In rapid he managed to limit the damage to a 21-point loss, but in blitz there was nothing to stop the bleeding, and when he left Leuven the Russian had lost an incredible 121 blitz points.

The most stable player was Vishy Anand, who gained 6.8 points in rapid and 26 in blitz. The former World Champion could not play in Paris because of an earlier commitment to appear in León, but he will take part in the remaining two GCT legs (in Paris he was replaced by wild card Laurent Fressinet; the wild card in Leuven was given to Carlsen).

Other shockers were Giri's 53-point loss in blitz and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave's 45-point loss in the same discipline.

But there were also pleasant surprises! Fabiano Caruana may have lost 77 rapid points, but in blitz he shot up to 8th place in the world rankings, thanks to a harvest of 128(!) points.

Finally, the most combined points were gained by Wesley So, who, if we forget about Magnus Carlsen for a moment, now shares first place in the overall GCT standings, together with Hikaru Nakamura. So only lost one rapid game and of the 36 blitz games he played he won as many as he lost, viz. 8. As a result, the American collected 107 rapid rating points and 62 blitz rating points.

With a harvest of 270 games it is impossible to do justice to all participants in Paris and Leuven, but we hope you will enjoy the selection that follows. We begin with an important victory by the winner of the Paris leg.

The rapid and blitz rating changes after Paris and Leuven

Rapid		
Carlsen	2894	+16
Nakamura	2839	-7
Anand	2802	+7
Vachier-Lagrave	2791	+7
Kramnik	2778	-21
Aronian	2770	+31
So	2759	+107
Caruana	2752	-77
Giri	2750	+12
Topalov	2715	-56
Fressinet	2676	-19

Blitz		
Carlsen	2873	-40
Nakamura	2842	-39
Aronian	2826	+26
Vachier-Lagrave	2823	-45
Caruana	2800	+128
So	2791	+62
Anand	2790	+26
Giri	2766	-54
Kramnik	2713	-122
Topalov	2710	+62
Fressinet	2628	-2

NOTES BY

Hikaru Nakamura

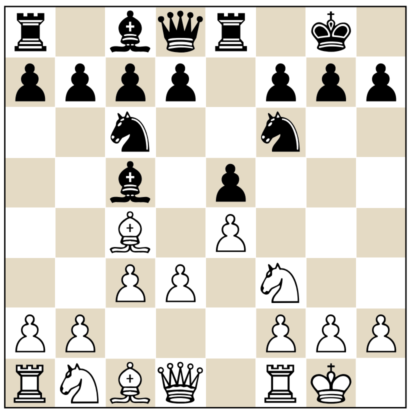
RL 7.1 – C65
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave
Hikaru Nakamura
Paris rapid 2016 (7)

This Round-7 game was critical, as it would be the start of a three-game winning streak to both close out and win the rapid portion of the Paris Grand Chess Tour. Prior to this game, I had started the second day with White and drawn against Wesley So. Having Black against Maxime is never a lot of fun, but the game turned out to be extremely smooth, and I never really looked back.

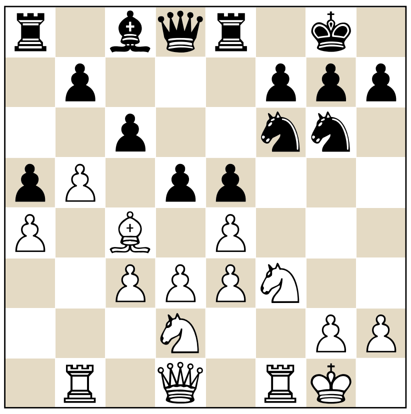
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3

Really the last try against the Berlin. Maxime played the endgame against me a couple of times during our play-off at the Gibraltar Chess Festival, but I held the draws pretty comfortably.

4...♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 ♖e8 7.♗c4?! A strange decision to try and side-step the main lines, but a practical decision in blitz. However, instead of avoiding theory, this simply transposes to a Giuoco Pianissimo down a tempo for White.



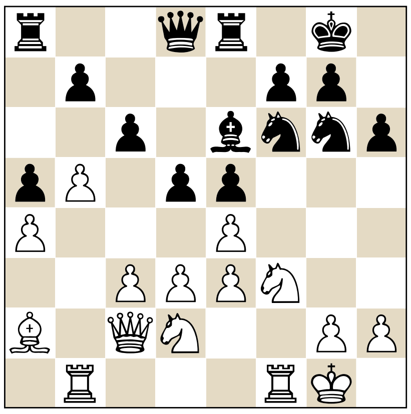
7...d6 8.b4 ♗b6 9.a4 a5 10.b5 ♘e7 11.♗e3 ♗xe3 12.fxe3 ♘g6 13.♘bd2 c6 14.♖b1 d5



15.♗a2?! This looks like the most natural move, but the bishop is actually worse on a2 than on b3.

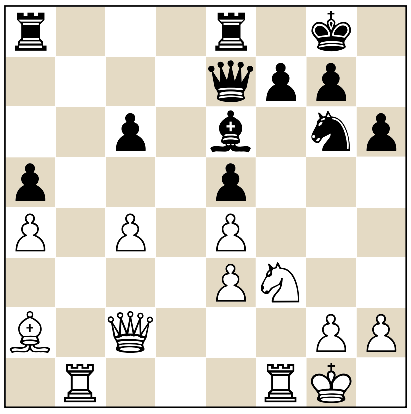
After 15.♗b3 ♗e6 16.bxc6 bxc6 17.exd5 cxd5 18.c4 h6 Black is better, but I suspect that White should be able to hold with precise play.

15...h6 16.♕c2 ♗e6



17.c4? After this move the rest of the game is an uphill struggle for White. After 17.bxc6 bxc6 18.♖b2 ♖b8 19.♖xb8 ♕xb8 20.♖b1 ♕d6 Black is better again, but it's not clear if the advantage is substantial enough. 17.exd5 was White's last chance to bail out with near equality: 17...cxd5 18.c4!, and according to the computers, Black is microscopically better.

17...dxe4 18.♘xe4 ♘xe4 19.dxe4 ♕e7 20.bxc6 bxc6



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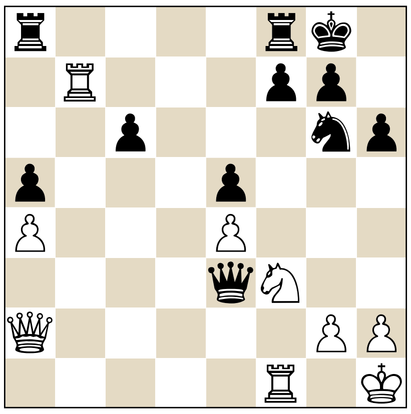
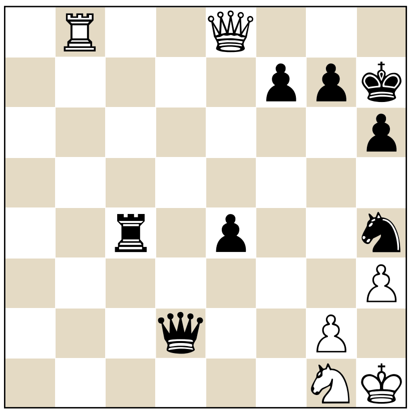
21.c5! The only move to try and complicate things. After 21.♕c3 ♕c5 22.♖f2 ♖eb8 Black has achieved a dream position and, with correct technical play, should win.

21...♗xa2 22.♕xa2 ♕xc5 23.♖b7 Desperation. **23...♕xe3+ 24.♔h1 ♖f8**



25.♕c4 In case of 25.♖e1 ♕c3, Black is simply up 2 pawns and White has no compensation.

25...♖ab8 26.♕xc6 ♖xb7 27.♕xb7 ♕e2 28.♕b5 ♕xe4 29.♕xa5 ♖a8 30.♕c7 ♖xa4 31.h3 ♕d5 32.♕c8+ ♔h7 33.♖b1 e4 34.♘g1 ♖c4 35.♕e8 ♘h4 36.♖b8 ♕d2



Here Maxime resigned in view of not having enough checks to prevent checkmate: 37.♕g8+ ♔g6 38.♖b6+ f6 39.♕e8+ (or 39.♖xf6+ ♔xf6 40.♕f8+ ♔g6 41.♕e8+ ♔h7) 39...♔h7.

■ ■ ■

Nakamura won the rapid section in Paris. In the blitz he tied for first with Magnus Carlsen. According to Anish Giri the two blitz games he played against the American had a significant influence on the final result.

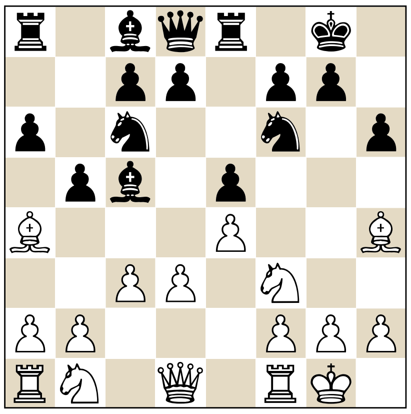
NOTES BY
Anish Giri

RL 7.1 – C65
Anish Giri
Hikaru Nakamura
Paris blitz 2016 (5)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0 ♖e8

Judging by Hikaru's games, he must have done serious work on this variation.

7.♗g5 a6 8.♗a4 h6 9.♗h4 b5



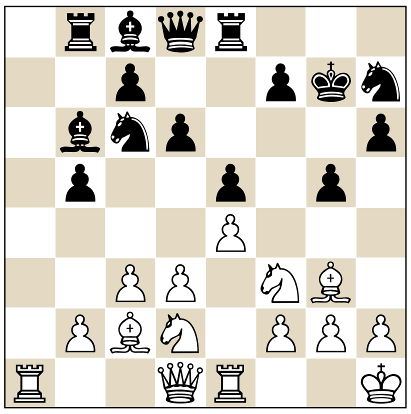
10.♗c2

10.♗b3 is the usual option, but sometimes ♗c2 is more clever; it's all too subtle.

10...g5 11.♗g3 d6

11...d5 is more in line with 6...♖e8, which kept this option open, but the natural game move is by no means bad.

12.♘bd2 ♗b6 13.a4 ♖b8 14.axb5 axb5 15.♔h1 ♔g7 16.♖e1 ♘h7

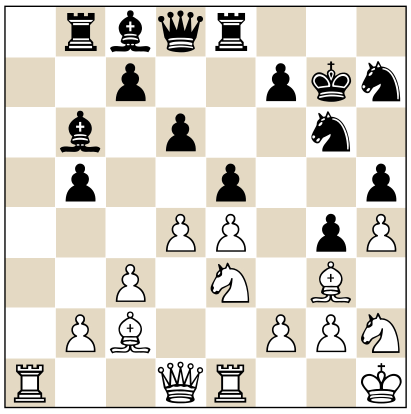


I am not sure that this is the right plan for this particular position, but even if it is, it could have been done on the previous move. 15...♔g7 is a useless move, though of course blitz chess is full of those.

17.♘f1 h5 18.h4 g4 19.♘3h2 ♘e7?

19...♘f8! was the way, maintaining control of the d4-square.

20.d4! ♘g6 21.♘e3!

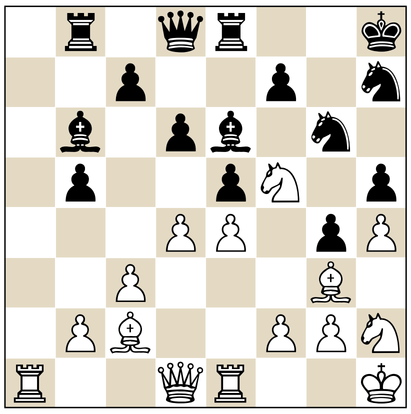


21...♗e6?

21...exd4 22.cxd4 ♘xh4 had to be played, for what it's worth, but after 23.f3 Black's king position is going to be blown open and my manoeuvring suddenly makes a lot of sense.

21...♘xh4? fails to 22.dxe5!.

22.♘f5+ ♔h8



23.f3!

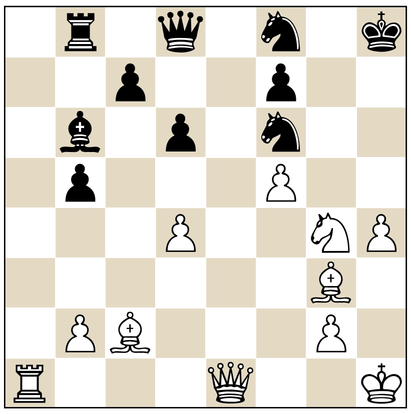
It is becoming clear that what I did in the last eight moves made a lot more sense than what Hikaru did. Here he sank into deep thought. He didn't want to lose without a fight.

23...exd4 24.cxd4

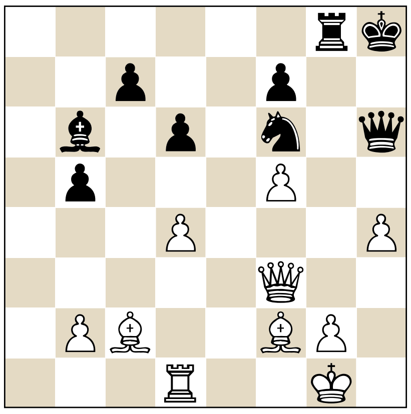
24.fxg4!? is also great.

24...♗xf5 25.exf5 ♖xe1+ 26.♕xe1 ♘gf8 27.fxg4 hxg4 28.♘xg4 ♘f6

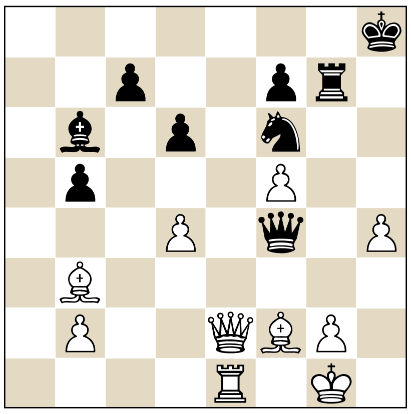
Here I sensed what Hikaru wanted. He is about to achieve some sort of stability. Unfortunately, I made a very big practical mistake.



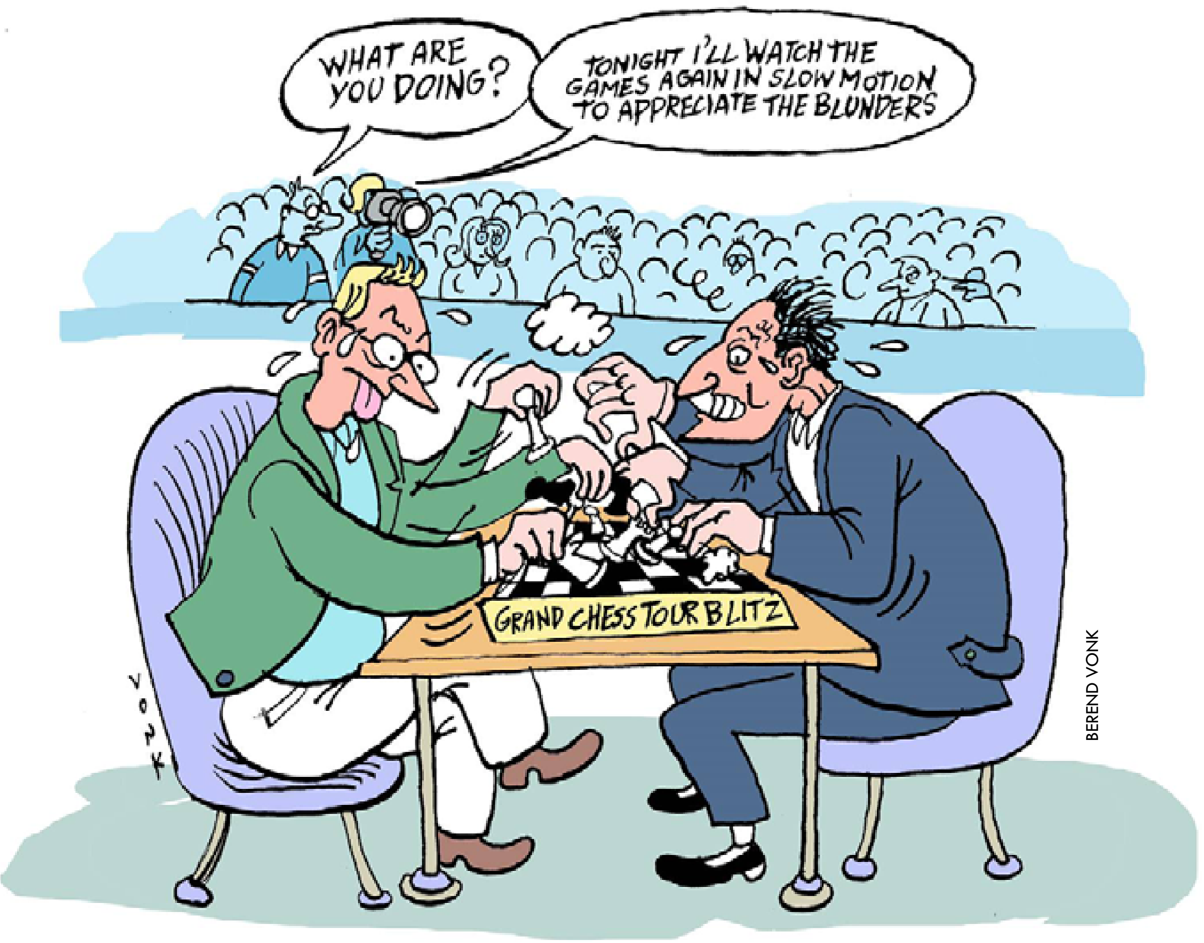
29.♕d1? Consolidating the extra pawn, but at the same time giving Black time to gain some stability.
29.♘h6! is crushing: 29...♕d7 (29...♔g7 30.♗f4!) 30.♗b3!. I had missed this move.
29...♘xg4 30.♕xg4 ♕f6 31.♖d1? Continuing my greedy strategy. **31...♘h7 32.♗f2 ♕h6 33.♔g1 ♖g8 34.♕f3 ♘f6**



Now Black has achieved an ideal set-up and I had only seconds left. Still, there was no need to blunder.
35.♗b3 ♖g7 36.♖e1 ♕d2 37.♕e2 ♕f4



38.d5?? Panic.
38.♕e3! keeps the balance.
38...♘g4 39.♗xb6 ♕h2+ 40.♔f1 ♕h1+ 41.♗g1 ♘h2+ 42.♔f2 ♖xg2+ 43.♔e3 ♖xe2+ 44.♔xe2 ♕f3+ 45.♔d2 ♕xb3 46.♗d4+ ♔h7 White resigned.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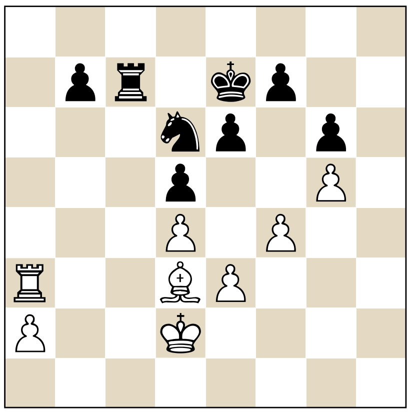
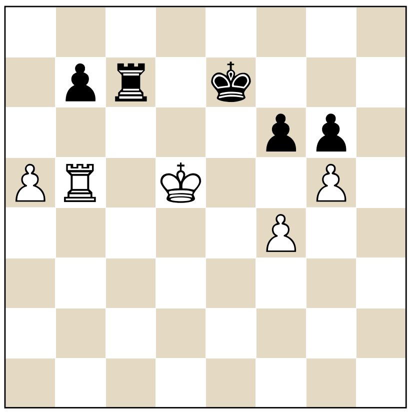
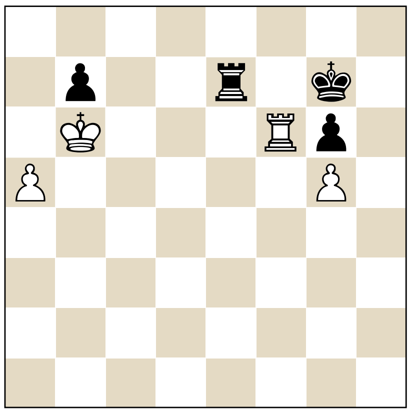


Nakamura-Giri
Paris blitz 2016
position after 41.♗d3

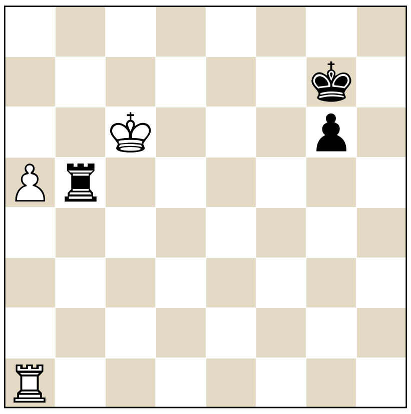
41...♘c4+? The rook ending is obviously a draw, which was the result I had been aiming for in this game for quite some time already. However, after the game it immediately dawned on me that with the knight on d6 only Black can play for a win. So I should have played 41...♖c8!.
42.♗xc4 ♖xc4 43.♖b3 ♖c7 44.a4 ♔d7 45.♖b5 ♔d6 46.♔d3 ♔d7 47.a5 ♔d6 48.e4 dxe4+ 49.♔xe4 ♖d7 50.♖c5 ♖d8 51.♖b5 ♖d7 52.♖b1 ♖c7 53.♖b6+ ♔e7 54.♔e5 ♖d7 55.♖b5 ♖c7 56.d5 exd5 57.♔xd5



57...f6?? A typical decision with only seconds to go. **58.♖b6 ♖d7+ 59.♔c5 fxg5 60.fxg5 ♔f7 61.♖f6+ ♔g7 62.♖d6** Or 62.♖e6 ♔f7 63.♖e5, winning. **62...♖e7 63.♔b6 ♔f7 64.♖f6+ ♔g7**



65.♖f1? White wins after 65.♖d6 ♔f7 66.♖d3 ♖e5 67.♖a3. **65...♖e5 66.♖a1 ♖xg5 67.♔xb7 ♖b5+ 68.♔c6**



Not an example of clean technique by Hikaru. Here I could still have saved the game.

68...♖b8?? But not this way.

68...♖f5! wins a crucial tempo: 69.a6 ♖f6+ 70.♔d5 ♖f5+ 71.♔e6 ♖f6+ 72.♔e5 ♖f5+ 73.♔e4 ♖f8 74.a7 ♖a8 75.♔d5 ♔f6 76.♔c6 ♔e5! 77.♔b7 ♖xa7+ 78.♖xa7 g5, and Black is going to be just in time.

69.a6 ♔f6 70.a7 ♖a8 71.♔b7 ♖xa7+ 72.♔xa7 ♔e5 73.♔b6 g5 74.♔c5 g4 75.♖e1+ ♔f4 76.♔d4 g3 77.♖f1+ ♔g4 78.♔e3 ♔h3 79.♖a1 ♔h2 Black resigned.

■ ■ ■

And so Giri lost both his games against Nakamura. He did better against co-winner Carlsen. One game he lost, but the other he won.

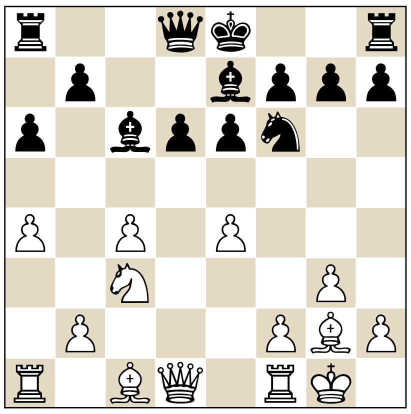
NOTES BY

Anish Giri

SI 41.8 – B41
Anish Giri
Magnus Carlsen
Paris blitz 2016 (15)

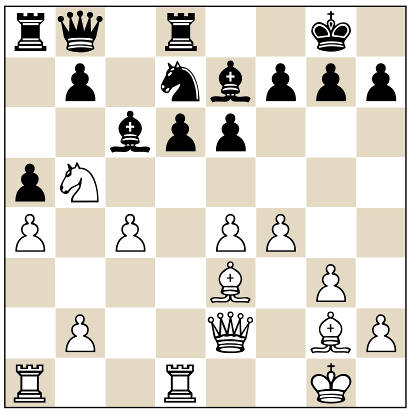
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.g3 d6 6.♗g2 ♘f6 7.c4 ♗d7 8.0-0 ♘c6 9.♘c3 ♗e7 10.♘xc6 ♗xc6 11.a4

I was happy to get a pleasant version of the Hedgehog for White.

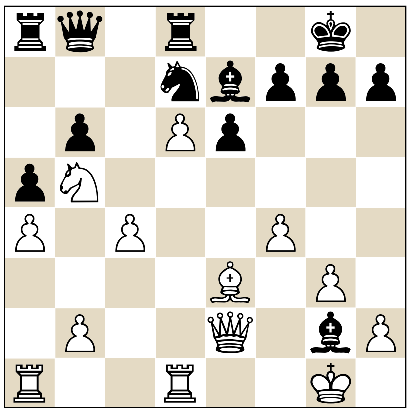


11...a5 An interesting positional decision. Black gains some dark squares, but now I know where I am going to put my c3-knight.

12.♗e3 0-0 13.♕e2 ♘d7 14.♖fd1 ♕b8 15.♘b5 ♖d8 16.f4



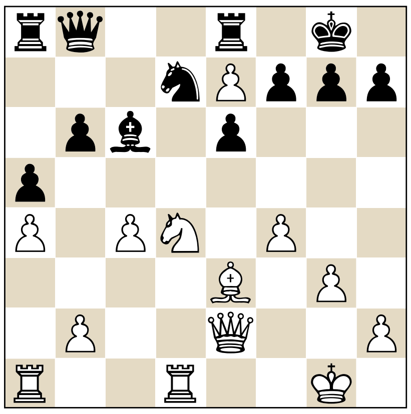
16...b6? Positionally sound, but Magnus blunders a tactic. Not the last one in this game. **17.e5!** At first I wanted to reject this move, but then I realized that I was going to take on d6 with the rook and double on the d-file, winning material. **17...♗xg2 18.exd6**



18...♗c6 As 18...♗xd6 19.♖xd6! ♗e4 20.♖ad1 ♕b7 21.♗xb6 is losing.

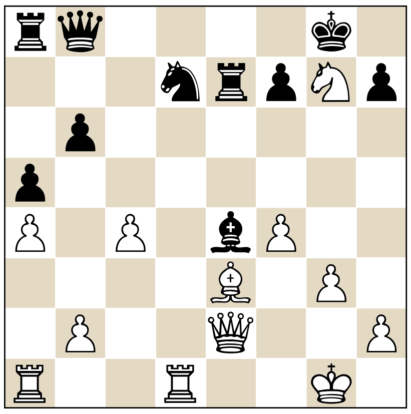
19.dxe7 ♖e8 20.♘d4

20.♕d2 ♖xe7 21.♕d6 was an alternative way to punish my opponent for his blunder.



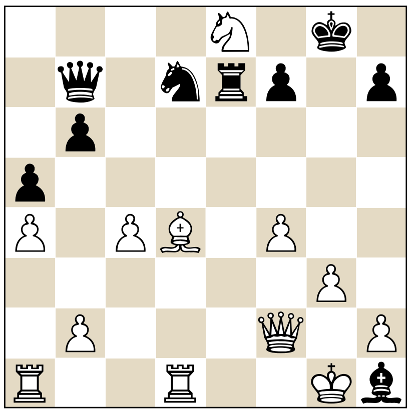
20...♗e4? Asking for it! But 20...♕b7 21.♘xc6 ♕xc6 22.♕d2 ♖xe7 23.♕d6 is a sad endgame for Black.

21.♘xe6! ♖xe7 22.♘xg7!



The knight has quite a career, and this is not even the end of it.

22...♕b7 23.♗d4! No ghosts. **23...♗h1 24.♕f2 ♖ae8?** Ouch. **25.♘xe8**



The rest was just frustration on my opponent's part. **25...♖xe8 26.♖e1 ♗e4 27.f5 f6 28.♕f4 ♕c6 29.♖e3 ♘c5 30.♖ae1 ♘d3 31.♕g4+ ♔f8 32.♖1e2 ♘c5 33.h4 ♖e7 34.♕f4 ♘d3 35.♕h6+ ♔f7 36.♖xd3 ♕xc4 37.♕xf6+ ♔e8 38.♕h8+ ♔d7 39.♖dd2 ♔c7 40.♕f6 ♖d7 41.♕e5+** Black resigned.

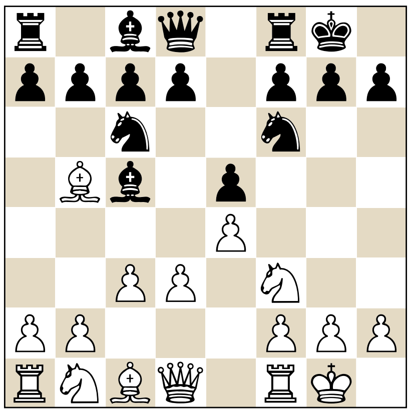
■ ■ ■

As said, Magnus Carlsen had good reason to regret the loss on time in a winning position against Wesley So in the first round of the Paris rapid competition, as in the end he finished half a point behind Hikaru Nakamura. Probably his finest rapid effort in the French capital was the following win against Levon Aronian.

NOTES BY
Peter Heine Nielsen

RL 7.1 – C65
Magnus Carlsen
Levon Aronian
Paris rapid 2016 (3)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 0-0 6.0-0

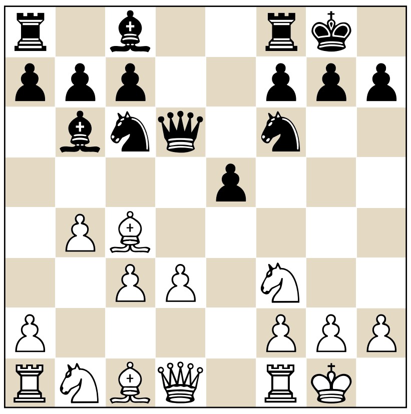


6...d5!? At top level especially 6...d6, but also 6...♖e8, have been the preferred moves recently. But Levon had prepared a surprise.

7.exd5 ♕xd5 8.♗c4 ♕d6

Later, in the rapid, he played 8...♕d7!? against MVL and also got a decent position.

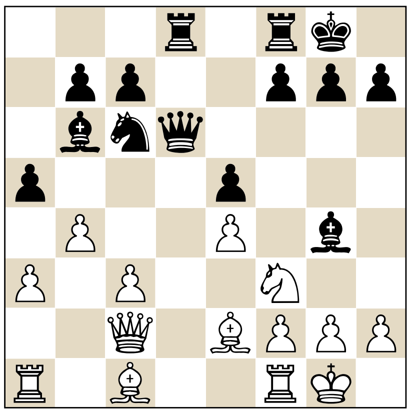
9.b4 ♗b6



10.♘bd2

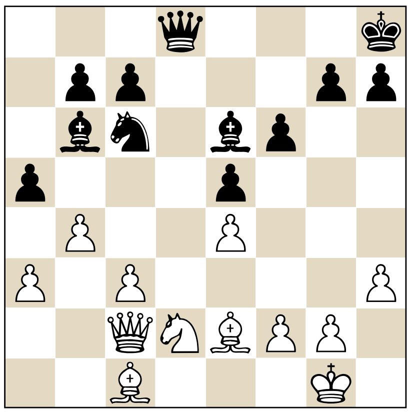
The computer indicates 10.♗a3!? as a critical reply, but it is not an easy move to play against a prepared opponent, and Magnus sticks to common-sense chess.

10...♗f5 11.♕c2 ♖ad8 12.♘e4 ♘xe4 13.dxe4 ♗g4 14.♗e2 a5 15.a3



I guess the opening has to be described as a success for Aronian. It's an equal symmetrical position in which it is hard to see why White should have any objective edge. Even so, Magnus makes it look just like that!

15...♔h8 16.♗g5 f6 17.♖ad1 ♕e7 18.♗c1 ♖xd1 19.♖xd1 ♖d8 20.h3 ♗e6 21.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 22.♘d2

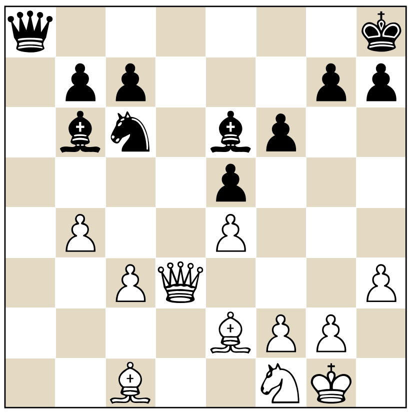


Still very minimal, but ♘c4 or even ♗c4 would start being moderately bothering to Black. The bishop on b6 looks nice and better than its counterpart on c1, but it is a target for White, so Aronian decides to cover the c4-square.

22...♕g8 23.♕d3 axb4 24.axb4 ♕a8!?

The point is that now 25.♘c4 ♗xc4!? 26.♕xc4 ♕a1 generates strong counterplay.

25.♘f1



25...♕a1?!

Aronian later regretted this move, saying that he got too optimistic. And it is true that, although it looks active, the queen will soon be forced back to defend, making ...♕a1 an empty shot.

26.♗e3 ♗xe3 27.♕xe3 ♗g8?!

27...♕e1!? would have been an interesting way to try and force a queen swap, as the queen is forced to keep the bishop on e2 defended. White

Paris rapid 2016		cat. XXII	
			TPR
1	Nakamura	7	3003
2	Carlsen	6½	2942
3	So	5½	2865
4	Vachier-Lagrave	5½	2863
5	Kramnik	5	2823
6	Giri	4½	2784
7	Aronian	4½	2783
8	Fressinet	2½	2628
9	Topalov	2	2566
10	Caruana	2	2561

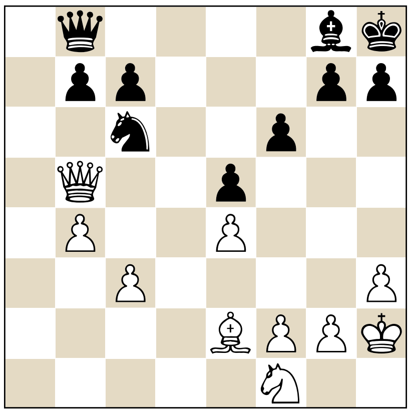
Paris blitz 2016		cat. XXII	
			TPR
1	Carlsen	11½	2878
2	Nakamura	11½	2885
3	Vachier-Lagrave	11	2863
4	Aronian	10	2826
5	Caruana	10	2824
6	Giri	9	2784
7	So	8½	2764
8	Topalov	8	2743
9	Kramnik	5½	2639
10	Fressinet	5	2628

LENNART OOTES

Even though Magnus Carlsen finished overall second in Paris, the World Champion remained in high spirits.

could play the endgames after, for example, ♗g4!? or ♗b5, but Black should hold.

28.♕c5! ♕a7 29.♕b5! ♕a8 30.♔h2 ♕b8

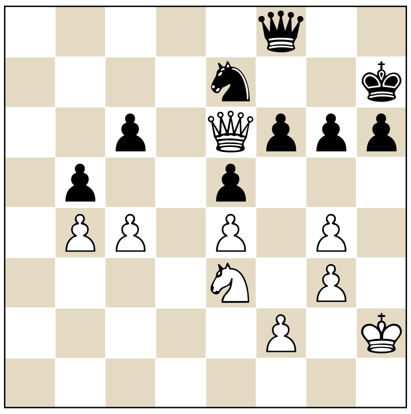


31.♘e3? Magnus has been playing true to his style. With very small means he has made chess look simple, conjuring a serious advantage out of what to most others must have looked like thin air. Here, however, he plays an inaccurate move that Levon could have punished him for.

31...♗e6? But not this way. Instead, 31...♘d4!! is a beautiful tactic, forcing the exchange of the knight for the bishop, since after 32.cxd4 exd4 Black has the unusual threat of 33...c6, with a discovered check, attacking the white queen!

32.♗c4 Now order has been restored. White has a considerable edge due to the greater activity of his pieces and the weakness of c7.

32...♗d7 33.♕d5 ♕c8 34.♗e2 ♘e7 35.♕f7 ♕e8 36.♕c4 ♕d8 37.♕d3 ♕e8 38.♗g4 ♗xg4 39.hxg4 h6 40.♕c4 c6 41.♕e6 ♕f8 42.♕d7 b5 43.♕e6 ♔h7 44.g3 g6? 45.c4!

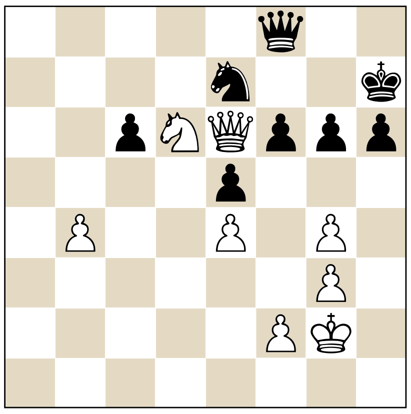


It's a rapid game, so some ups and downs can be expected. Magnus had let some of his edge slip, but Levon's last move was a mistake, weakening his kingside. Now Magnus opens a route for his knight to join the attack.

45...bxc4

Sad, but necessary, since otherwise 46.cxb5 cxb5 47.♕d7 just wins the pawn on b5.

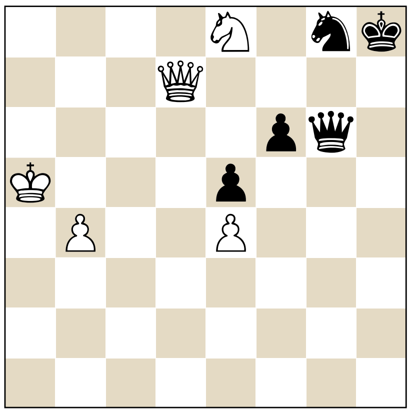
46.♘xc4 ♔g7 47.♘d6 ♔h7 48.♔g2!



With Black completely tied down, the white king can safely walk to the queenside to break Black's resistance.

48...♔g7 49.♔f1 ♔h7 50.♔e2 ♔g7 51.♔d3 ♘g8 52.♘e8+ ♔h8 53.♔c4 h5 54.gxh5 ♕h6!? A desperate attempt to fight for a perpetual, but White hides his king easily.

55.♕xc6 ♕d2 56.hxg6 ♕e2+ 57.♔c5 ♕xf2+ 58.♔b5 ♕xg3 59.♕d7 ♕xg6 60.♔a5



Even with the material being equal, it is completely winning for White. The b-pawn will queen, and Black has no counterplay whatsoever.

60...♕g3 61.b5 ♕c3+ 62.♔a6 ♕a3+ 63.♔b7 ♕g3 64.b6 ♕g6 65.♔a7 f5 66.exf5 ♕g3 67.f6 ♕a3+ 68.♔b8 Black resigned.

■ ■ ■

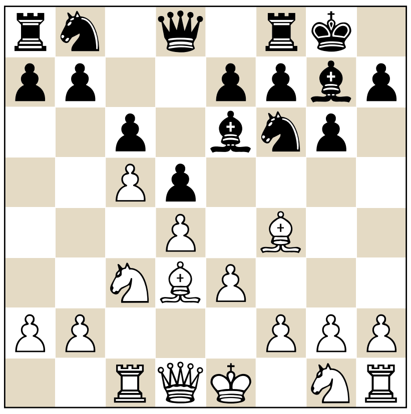
The obvious local favourite in Paris was Maxime Vachier-Lagrave. The Parisian grandmaster could be satisfied finishing fourth in the rapid and third in the blitz. In the rapid he did particularly well with Black.

NOTES BY
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave

GI 3.11 – D83
Wesley So
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave
Paris rapid 2016 (3)

As I had lost my second rapid game against Magnus in hopeless fashion, I was hoping to strike back immediately, to avoid losing my confidence.

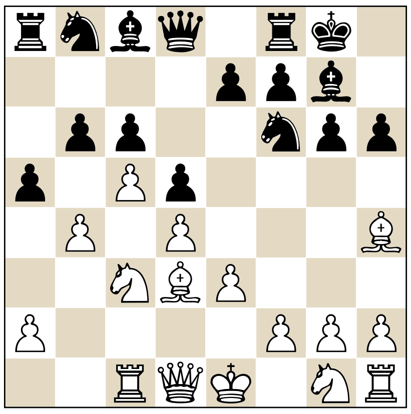
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.♗f4 ♗g7 5.e3 0-0 6.♖c1 ♗e6 7.c5 c6 8.♗d3



8...♗c8

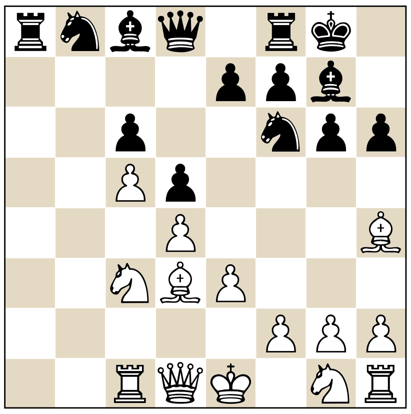
More adequate than 8...♗g4 9.♘ge2 ♖e8 10.f3 ♗c8 11.0-0 ♘bd7 12.♗g5 e5 13.b4 ♘f8 14.♗h4 ♗h6 15.f4, which ended very badly for me in my game against Wojtaszek in Biel 2015.

9.♗g5 h6 10.♗h4 b6 11.b4 a5



12.a3 After 12.b5 bxc5 13.dxc5 the central break 13...d4 helps Black considerably, and after 14.exd4 ♕xd4 15.♘f3 ♕xc5 16.0-0 cxb5 17.♘xb5 ♕b6 Black should be alright.

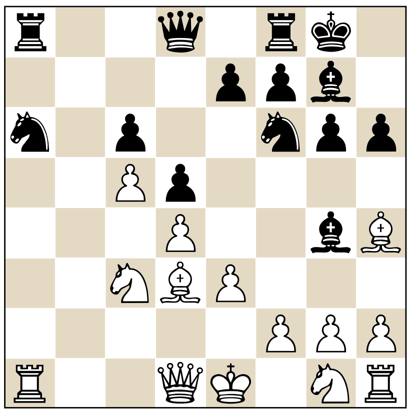
12...axb4 13.axb4 bxc5 14.bxc5



14...♘a6! The idea behind ...♘b4 is hindering White's development.

15.♖a1 15.♘f3 ♘b4 16.♗e2 ♘a2 17.♘xa2 ♖xa2 18.0-0 ♘e4 19.♖c2 ♕a5 would get me very active play.

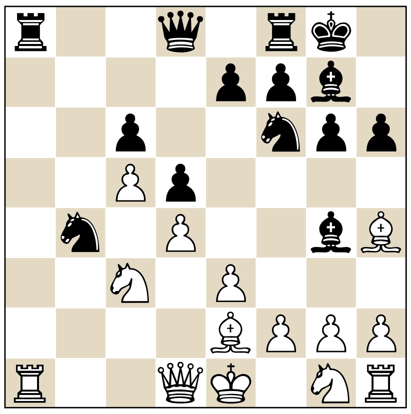
15...♗g4



This move involves a piece sacrifice, and I was absolutely unsure about the consequences. But with the minutes going I found it more and more tempting with White's kingside being underdeveloped, so I just went for it. The simple 15...♗b7!, with the renewed idea of ...♘b4, would have been objectively better, but I had missed the pretty shot 16.♖a4 (16.♗e2 is met by 16...♘d7!, followed inevitably by ... ♘xc5) 16...♘xc5! 17.dxc5 ♘d7 18.♘ge2 ♖xa4 19.♕xa4 (or 19.♘xa4 ♕a5+ 20.♔f1 ♖a8 21.♗c2 ♘xc5 22.♘xc5 ♕xc5) 19...♘xc5 20.♕c2 ♕a5 21.0-0 ♘xd3 22.♕xd3 ♗a6 23.♕c2 ♗xc3, and in both cases Black emerges with a material advantage.

16.♗e2?! The safe reply I had anticipated. Stronger was 16.f3! ♘b4 17.♖xa8 ♕xa8. I had a few ideas in mind in this position, but none works too well if White responds accurately: 18.♗xf6 (after 18.fxg4 ♘xg4! 19.♗f2 e5 I had missed the resource 20.♘ge2!, after which I wouldn't have enough of an attack, even though I would keep some hope due to White's constricted pieces) 18...♘xd3+ 19.♕xd3 ♗f5 20.e4 ♕a1+ 21.♘d1 dxe4 22.fxe4 ♗xf6 23.exf5 ♗xd4. I was pinning my hopes on this position, but that was overly optimistic in view of 24.fxg6 ♖d8 25.gxf7+ ♔g7 26.♕c2 ♕a5+ 27.♔f1, and my attack falters.

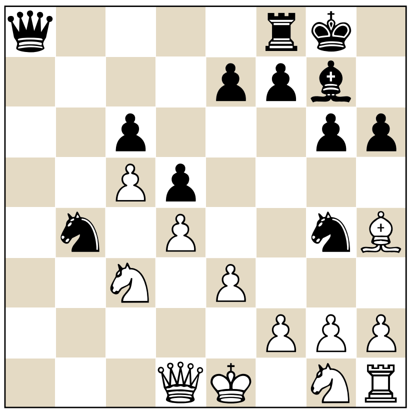
16...♘b4!



17.♖xa8

After 17.♖a4 ♘e4! 18.♘xe4 (18.♖xa8 ♕xa8 19.♘xe4 dxe4! would again lead to a huge attack starting from the queenside after 20.♗xg4 ♘d3+ 21.♔f1 ♖b8 22.♘e2 f5) 18...♘d3+! would have been a fantastic shot leading to a deadly attack: 19.♕xd3 ♖xa4 20.♘c3 ♖a1+ 21.♘d1 ♕a5+ 22.♕d2 ♕a3 23.♗xg4 ♖b8 24.♘e2 ♖b2 25.♕c3 ♖b3 26.♕c2 ♕b4+ 27.♘ec3 (27.♕d2 ♖d3) 27...♖xc3 28.♕d2 ♕b3 29.0-0 ♖c2 30.♕e1 f5.

17...♕xa8 18.♗xg4 ♘xg4



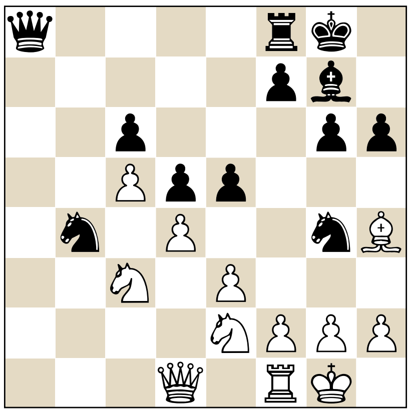
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave: 'As I had lost my second rapid game against Magnus in hopeless fashion, I was hoping to strike back immediately, to avoid losing my confidence.'

NEW IN CHESS

19.♘ge2 Less good was 19.♕xg4? ♕a1+ 20.♘d1. I was not entirely convinced that my position was winning here, but White can't castle, so his ♖h1 remains out of play, as well as his ♗h4, and that's too much after 20...♘d3+ (not the only winning move, as I could also calmly bring my rook to the queenside first) 21.♔e2 (21.♔f1 ♖b8) 21...h5! 22.♕d7 (22.♕f3 ♖a8! 23.♔xd3 ♖a2 24.♘c3 ♖b2) 22...♕b1! 23.♘c3 ♕c2+ 24.♔f3 ♗xd4!.

19...e5 20.0-0

Despite all my efforts, the position is now very balanced. Also, my ♘b4 doesn't have a stable outpost yet and could easily be a cause for concern.



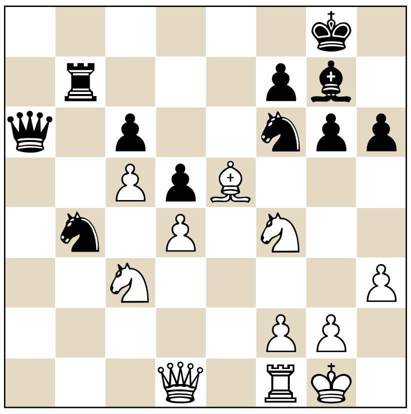
20...♖b8

20...♖e8 21.♕b3 exd4 22.exd4 ♘a2 23.♖a1 ♘xc3 24.♖xa8 ♘xe2+ 25.♔f1 ♘xh2+ 26.♔e1 ♖xa8 27.♔xe2 is definitely unpleasant, since the pawn on c6 is very weak.

21.♗g3 ♖b7 22.h3

After 22.♕d2, 22...e4 23.f3 ♘f6 24.♗e5 exf3 25.gxf3 ♘d7 26.♗g3 ♖a7! is the critical idea. I need to find a way to keep the ♘b4 in play. 27.♖b1 ♖a1, and I'm just in time.

22...exd4 23.exd4 ♘f6 24.♗e5 ♕a6 24...♘a2 was simpler. **25.♘f4**



25...♕c4

25...♘e8 26.♗xg7 ♘xg7 27.♕d2 is a bit unpleasant, as the ♘b4 is out of play unless I go ...g5, which would allow a swift f4.

26.♕d2

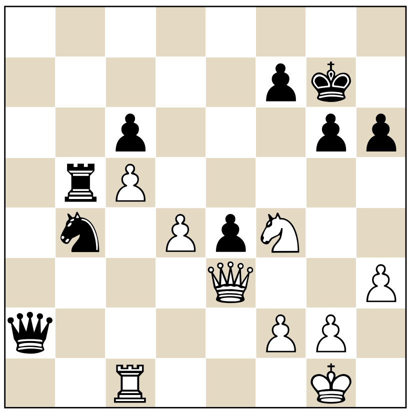
26.♕a4 ♔h7 27.♕a8 ♖e7 would hold.

26...♘e4 27.♘xe4 dxe4 28.♗xg7

After 28.♖b1 ♖b5 29.♖c1 there is 29...♕a2. After I had spotted this resource, I was not too concerned playing my 26th move.

28...♔xg7 29.♖b1 ♖b5 30.♖c1 ♕a2 31.♕e3

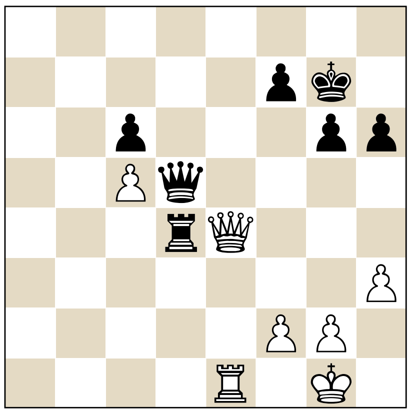
Wesley failed to realize the power of my next move, or he'd have settled for a draw with, for instance, 31.♕xa2.



31...♘d5 32.♘xd5

32.♕xe4! ♕d2 33.♘e2 (33.♘d3? ♖b3) 33...♖b2 34.♔f1 was still holding by a thread, but looked extremely suspect.

32...♕xd5 33.♖e1 ♖b4 34.♕xe4 ♖xd4



Now I'll probably end up with an extra pawn, since c5 is bound to fall.

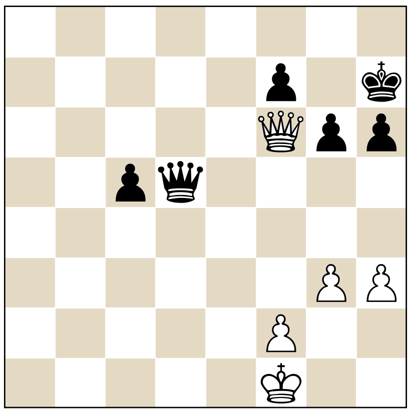
35.♕e7

35.♕xd5 ♖xd5 36.♖c1 ♔f6 looks dangerous, as the c-pawn is quite an asset in these rook endings, since it is far enough for White's king not to be able to cover it and protect his kingside pawns at the same time, while Black's king is only a couple of steps away from supporting its march, meaning that White can't take all the kingside pawns before Black queens, if he decides to defend in this fashion. Still, I believe White has enough tempi to organize a decent defensive set-up.

35...♖c4 36.♖e5 ♖c1+ 37.♖e1

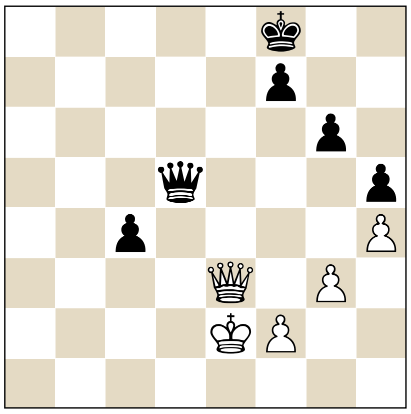
37.♔h2 ♕d4 would lose a crucial pawn as well.

37...♖xe1+ 38.♕xe1 ♕xc5
But now the queen ending is even worse than the rook ending, since I will easily parry any counterplay and be able to advance my c-pawn at the same time. Also, with so little time on the clock it's harder to keep track of all the possible checks and queen exchanges, making White's defensive task far less automatic.
39.♕a1+ ♔h7 40.♕f6 ♕d5 41.g3 c5 42.♔f1

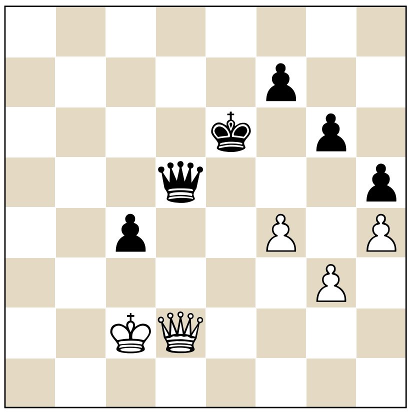


42...c4

42...♕e6! 43.♕xe6 fxe6 44.♔e2 g5 45.♔d3 ♔g6 46.♔c4 ♔f5 47.f3 e5 would have worked out quite well, but I couldn't be certain and, with only a couple of minutes on the clock, I decided to keep things under control: 48.♔xc5 e4 49.♔d4 exf3 50.♔e3 g4, and Black wins.
43.♔e2 ♔g8 44.♕c3 h5 45.h4 ♔f8 46.♕e3
Trying to keep my king out of play.



46...♕d6 And not 46...♕e6?? 47.♕xe6 fxe6 48.♔d2. **47.♕c3 ♕c5 48.♕e3 ♕d5 49.♕d2**
49.♔e1 felt like the best chance to keep my king cut off. **49...♕e5+ 50.♔d1** After 50.♕e3 ♕b2+ 51.♔e1 c3 52.♕d4 White would still retain defensive chances. **50...♔e7 51.♔c2 ♔e6 52.f4** 52.♕d8 ♕d5 53.♕e8+ ♔f5 54.f3! was White's final defensive opportunity, although it should lose in the long run after 54...♕d3+ 55.♔b2 ♕b3+ 56.♔c1 ♕c3+ 57.♔b1 ♕xf3 58.♕xf7+ ♔g4 59.♕xg6+ ♔h3.
52...♕d5



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With my king coming over to the kingside, Wesley resigned. This game started my streak of four consecutive wins... as Black! But I wasn't quite as convincing with White. I was still badly trailing the leading duo Hikaru and Magnus, and never got close to catching them.

* * *

The visit to Wijk aan Zee in summer between the Paris and Leuven legs did not fail to boost Magnus Carlsen's morale. Most probably he was not as dominant as he may have hoped for but in the end he won both the rapid and blitz in the Leuven Town Hall.

His second Peter Heine Nielsen selected two instructive games by his boss. An impressive rapid victory against the man he dethroned in Chennai in 2013, and an interesting draw in the blitz against the 14th World Champion.

MAGNUS CARLSEN

Oh, to be in Wijk aan Zee now that summer's here. As a real tourist Magnus Carlsen took a selfie and posted it on his personal Facebook page.

NOTES BY

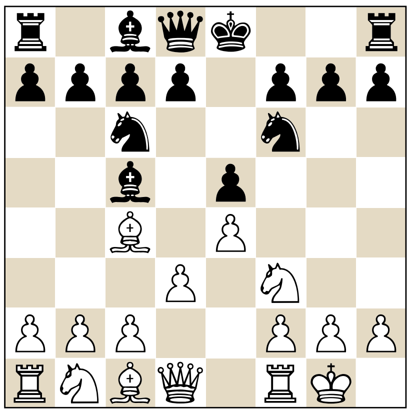
Peter Heine Nielsen

IG 2.12 – C54
Magnus Carlsen
Vishy Anand
Leuven rapid 2016 (8)

Vishy came fresh from León, where he had scored an impressive victory, and his good form continued in Leuven, where he took an early lead. Magnus had finished Day 1 on a very low note with two losses, but managed to recover on Day 2. At this point he had scored wins in his first two games, and with this game he managed to take the lead, a lead that he would never again relinquish.

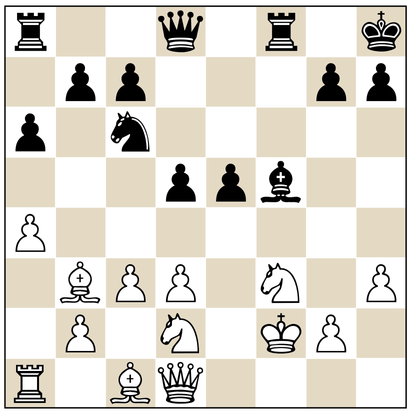
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4!?
All the rage. The Italian Game used to be considered dull and drawish, but these days, with the Berlin being exactly that, old evaluations have to be reconsidered, and Vishy even had this position as many as 8(!) times in the tournament.

3...♗c5 4.0-0 ♘f6 5.d3



5...d6 5...0-0!? used to be considered interesting, the idea being 6.c3 d5!? 7.exd5 ♘xd5, when Black is supposed to have active piece play to compensate for the slight weakness of the e-pawn. However, Kramnik, Anand and Giri all played 8.a4!? in Paris and Leuven, adding new life to White's ambitions in this branch.

6.c3 a6 7.a4 a7!? Kramnik went for 7...h6 three times as Black, and as always with move orders one can expect Kramnik to have thought things through. Maybe the most exciting choice was Nakamura's 7...0-0!? 8.♖e1?! ♗a7 9.♘bd2 ♘g4! 10.♖e2. Now it looks as if White's h3 will push the black knight back, but after 10...♔h8 11.h3 f5! Naka showed that Black has a much more dynamic reply. Not willing to open the f-file, Topalov played 12.exf5!? ♘xf2 13.♖xf2 ♗xf2+ 14.♔xf2 d5 15.♗b3 ♗xf5



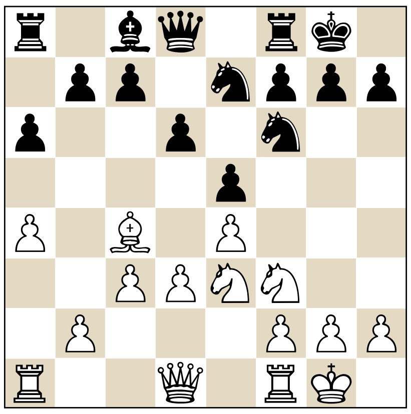
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

and although Black has an overwhelming position, White actually won the game. This led Anand to try the idea of 8.b4!? ♗a7 9.♗g5 against

Nakamura, and to So trying 8.♗g5!? against Anand.

8.♘a3 ♘e7!? 9.♘c2 0-0 10.♗e3 ♗xe3 11.♘xe3

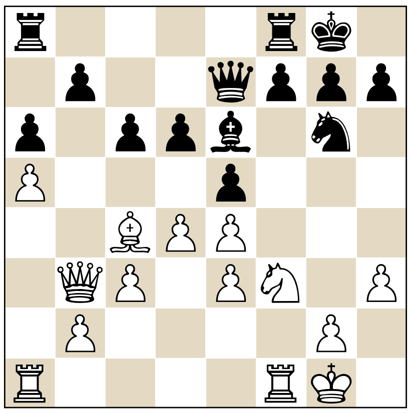
Later in the blitz, the players had the same position with colours reversed, and Magnus went for 11...a5, not allowing White to gain space on the queenside.



11...♘g6

11...a5!? 12.♖e1 ♘g6 13.♗b3 c6 14.♗c2 ♖e8 15.d4 ♕c7 was that blitz game, which was pretty equal.

12.a5 ♘g4 13.h3 ♘xe3 14.fxe3 ♕e7 15.♕b3 c6 16.d4 ♗e6



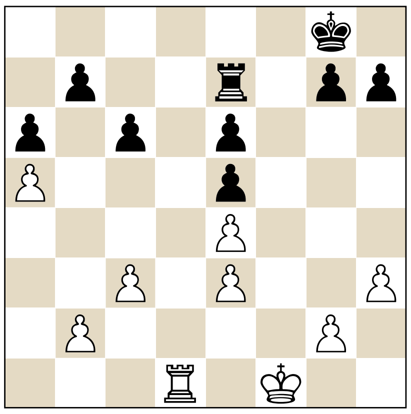
It looks as if Black has equalized, but as so often in Magnus games, small details can become substantial. White has more space on the queenside, and it can be said that the knight on g6 has slightly less potential than the knight on f3. Even so, Black should be confident in his defence.

17.♗xe6 fxe6 18.♖ad1 ♖ae8 19.♕b4!

Putting pressure on d6.

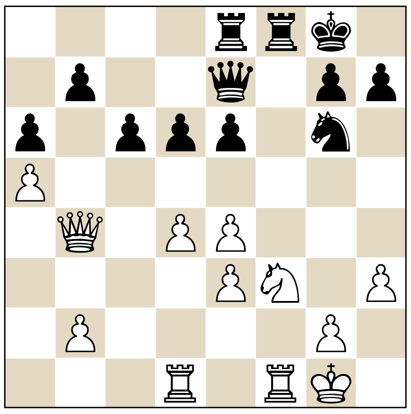
19...exd4

Of course, the position after 19...♖f7 20.dxe5 ♘xe5 21.♘xe5 dxe5 22.♕xe7 ♖xf1+ 23.♔xf1 ♖xe7 looks very symmetrical, but White has the idea of marching towards c5 with his king, and Vishy understandably tries to defend more actively.



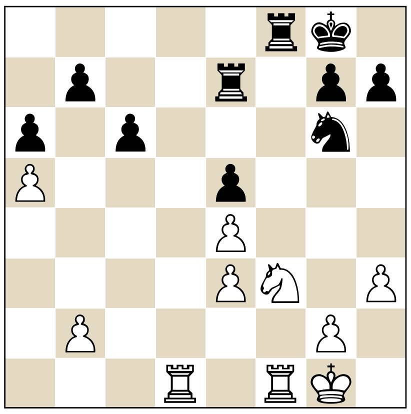
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

20.cxd4



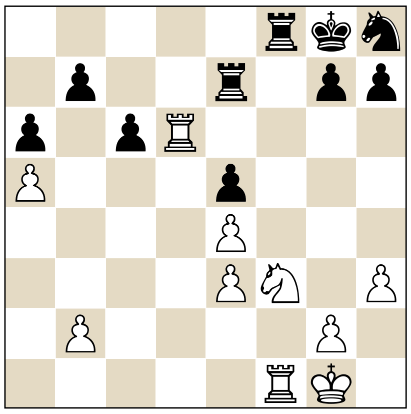
20...e5 A standard move, but leading to a passive endgame. However, things where already slightly unpleasant. After 20...d5 21.♕xe7 ♖xe7 22.♘d2 White will eye c5 for his knight, while 20...♖f7 21.♘d2 also maintains some pressure – maybe not a lot, but annoying and making it hard for Black to equalize completely.

21.dxe5 dxe5 22.♕xe7 ♖xe7



23.♖d6 A logical move, but it is worth noting that the computer suggests 23.♔f2!?, simply centralizing the king, and maybe aiming for the queenside, but also just keeping the tension, while improving his position. Anyhow, there is nothing wrong with the text-move.

23...♘h8



24.♘d2?! This, however, is an inaccuracy, allowing Black to exchange rooks to make his defence easier. Better was first 24.♖d3, following it up with ♖fd1 and then ♘d2, keeping a substantial edge.

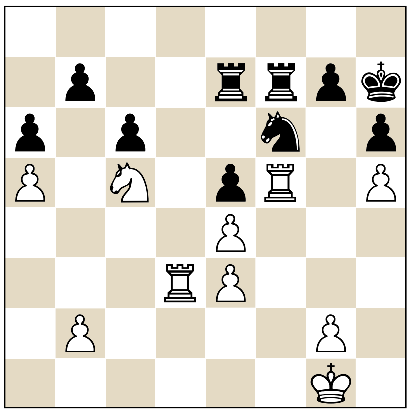
24...♘f7?! 25.♖d3 ♘g5 26.♖f5 h6 27.h4 ♘h7 28.♘b3

White now gets what he aimed for when he played move likes ♕b4, or, to a certain extent, even a5. The knight settles on c5, dooming Black to a passive defence.

28...♘f6 29.♘c5 ♖ff7 30.h5

The computer suggests 30.♖f3!?, intending to transfer the white king to the queenside, which also looks like a promising plan. But Magnus has his own idea.

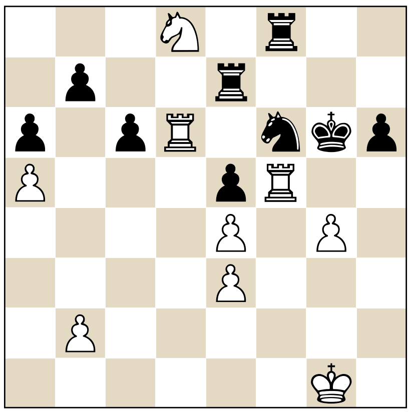
30...♔h7? An outright blunder, even though creating counterplay with ...g6 seems logical. But:



31.♖d8! Basically creating zugzwang. If 31...♖c7 then White wins with 32.♘e6+ and 33.♘f8+, so Black has no choice except to play the planned ...g6.

31...g6 32.hxg6+ ♔xg6 33.♖d6!

Pinning Black and emphasizing that Black's activity has just created more weaknesses. **33...♔g7 34.♘e6+! ♔g6 35.♘d8! ♖f8 36.g4!**



The final blow, making the zugzwang complete. Black cannot make a move without giving up material. Maybe the last slight practical chance was doing that immediately with 36...♖xd8 37.♖xd8 ♘ex4, even though White is clearly winning.

36...c5 37.b3 ♖ee8 38.♘xb7

And Vishy resigned, as first c5 and then a6 will fall, while counterplay is still nowhere to be seen.

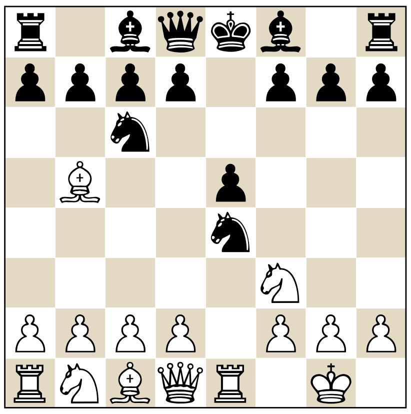
NOTES BY

Peter Heine Nielsen

RL 7.4 – C67
Magnus Carlsen
Vladimir Kramnik
Leuven blitz 2016 (14)

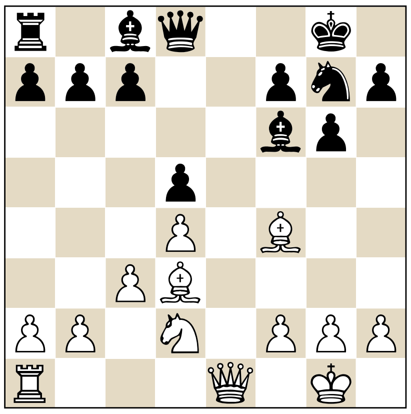
Kramnik used to be a difficult opponent for Magnus, but while the balance had obviously already changed, 2016 saw an extreme swing in Magnus's favour. Before this game the score was 7-0, with no draws! Only one of these seven games was classical chess, but even so, quite an extraordinary situation between the numbers 1 and 2 in the world rankings!

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.♖e1!?



As in their game in Qatar (still 2015!), where a draw sufficed for Magnus to clinch first place.

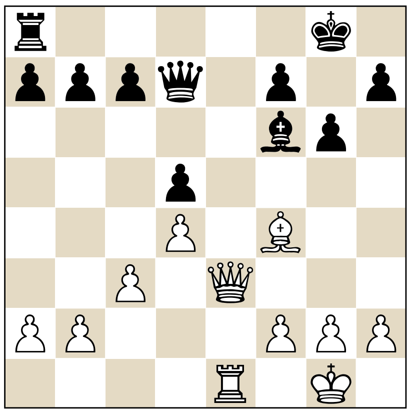
5...♘d6 6.♘xe5 ♗e7 7.♗f1 ♘xe5 8.♖xe5 0-0 9.d4 ♗f6 10.♖e1 ♖e8 11.c3 ♖xe1 12.♕xe1 ♘e8 13.♗f4 d5 14.♗d3 g6 15.♘d2 ♘g7



16.♘f1!?

Deviating from the Qatar game, which went 16.♘f3. The text-move looks like just swapping down to a draw, but Magnus had a specific idea in mind.

16...♗f5 17.♗xf5 ♘xf5 18.♘e3 ♘xe3 19.♕xe3 ♕d7 20.♖e1



Obviously the small details are in White's favour, but they still seem too

Celeb 64

John Henderson

Bono

The world has become accustomed to the dramatic onstage flair of U2 frontman Bono, who masterfully understands the emotional heft that can be communicated by just the right gesture. But this is all a far cry from the early seventies, when teenager Paul Hewson didn't hang around street corners in Dublin dreaming of rockstardom and a stage name but instead at chess clubs and becoming a grandmaster!

'I never knew what I wanted to be,' said Bono during an interview. 'One day I'd wake up and want to be a chess player – the best. I'd read a book on it, and at twelve I studied the grandmasters.' The U2 frontman says he 'fell head over heels for this dizzy strategic game,' and how regularly going to his hometown clubs at Ballymun and Phibsboro helped build his life-long love of chess.

And when Garry Kasparov campaigned to become FIDE president, Bono was there to support his cause. In a letter to Kasparov, Bono wrote: 'Thinking ahead, thinking around corners, guessing somebody else's next move... these were the pleasures of chess for me... my greatest childhood pleasure.'

And if you ever wondered if celebrities feel star-struck then Bono had this to say about his chess idol Kasparov: 'I met him recently in Dublin. I became a child again in his company. I badgered him about the titanic match of 1984 between himself and Karpov – while all he wanted to talk about was Ireland and sub-Saharan Africa.' ■

small to matter. Personally, I always suffered as Black against 5.♖e1, but I told myself it's you, not the position that there is something wrong with. Just give it to Kramnik, and he will show you how to draw it, I used to think. However, he also commits an inaccuracy. Best now would be first 20...h5!, creating 'luft' for the king, after which the h-pawn might be used positively for an attack. It is hard to believe that Black should be in any trouble.

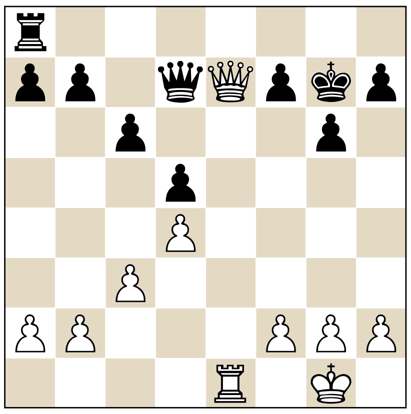
20...c6?

But after this move it's another matter.

21.♗h6!

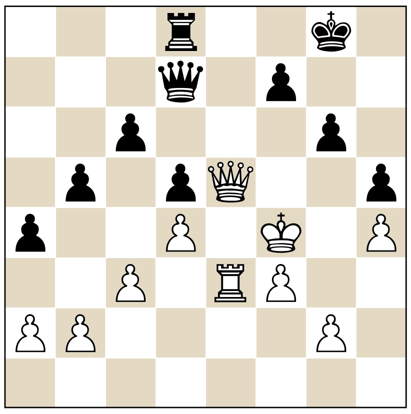
Suddenly Black is in dire straits. He can in no way activate his queen, as White has back-rank mate motifs with the queen sacrifice ♕e8+!. So there is no alternative to swapping bishops.

21...♗g7 22.♗xg7 ♔xg7 23.♕e7!



The big difference after the disappearance of the bishops is that White gets access to e7. The computers suggest exchanging queens with 23...♕xe7 24.♖xe7 ♖b8, but any human would say that 25.f3 ♔f6 26.♖c7 ♔e6 27.♔f2 is just terrible for Black, as he needs to keep b7 and f7 defended, which would mean that White can try in all peace and quiet to break through with his king and pawns on either side of the board.

23...♖d8 24.h4 h5 25.♖e3 b6 26.♕e5+ ♔g8 27.♔h2 a5 28.f3 a4 29.♔g3 b5 30.♔f4



This position led to quite a discussion in the players' room, where the participants used to gather after their games. The engines show only a moderate edge for White, but quite some players opined that White should be just winning. There is a lot of logic to that statement. ♔g5 is a threat, and g4 next could also prove very difficult for Black to handle. But even when I turn on the engines, I cannot prove a deci-

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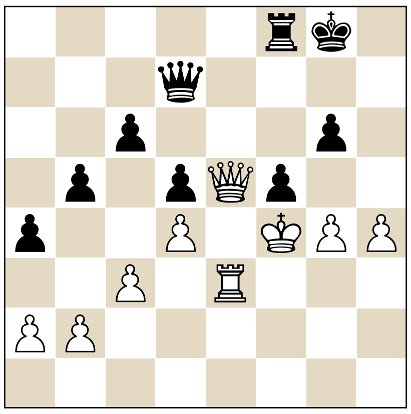
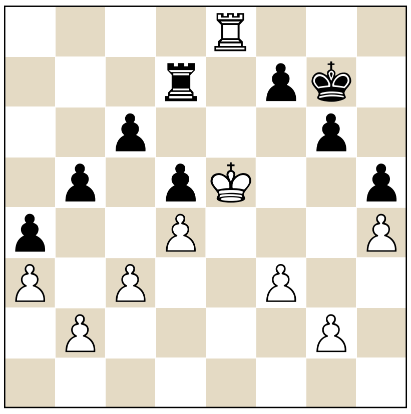
sive edge against 30...♖f8!. The obvious point is that 31.♔g5? is impossible due to 31...f6+, and after 31.g4 hxg4 32.fxg4 f5! Black seems to hold.



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

The point is that 33.g5 ♕h7! creates counterplay, which also after 33.♕e6+ ♕xe6 34.♖xe6 fxg4+ 35.♔xg4 ♔g7 36.♖xc6 ♖f2! seems to be just enough. Much in the style of the game would be 31.a3!?, trying to claim zugzwang! 31...♕c8 32.g4 hxg4 33.fxg4 f5 34.g5!, for example, is now completely winning, as the queen cannot create threats on the h-file now. 31...♕d8 32.♕e7 ♕b8+ 33.♔g5 ♕g3+ 34.♔h6 ♕f4+ 35.♕g5 looks like leading to a dominating endgame, but there are subtle differences compared to the game. After 35...♕xg5+ 36.hxg5, 36...h4! seems surprisingly solid for Black, and White's 'active' king on h6 is also somewhat boxed in. 36.♔xg5!? looks better, but after 36...♔g7 37.♖e7 ♖d8 Black has a much better defensive set-up than in the game, as the white king will not reach e5. My intuition tells me White must have a way in these lines, but I do not see it.

30...♕d6? 31.♕xd6 ♖xd6 32.♖e8+ ♔g7 33.♔e5 ♖d7 34.a3!

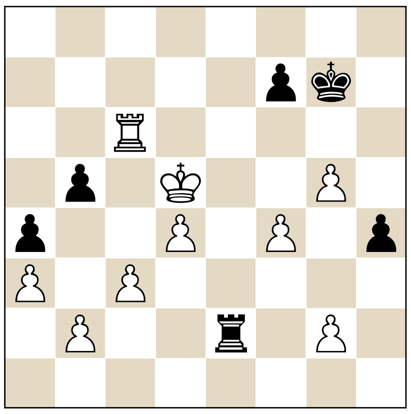


NEW IN CHESS

Out-of-form Vladimir Kramnik was the biggest victim of the rating earthquake, shedding 21 rapid and 122 blitz rating points.

Complete zugzwang! King moves lose to ♔f6, rook moves to ♔d6, and 34...f6+ 35.♔e6 threatens the rook, and when it moves, 36.♖e7+ forces an easily winning pawn ending. So Kramnik has no choice but to start shedding pawns, just to obtain a bit of counterplay.

34...g5 35.hxg5 h4 36.f4 ♔g6 37.♖g8+ ♔h7 38.♖c8 ♔g7 39.♖xc6 ♖e7+ 40.♔xd5 ♖e2!

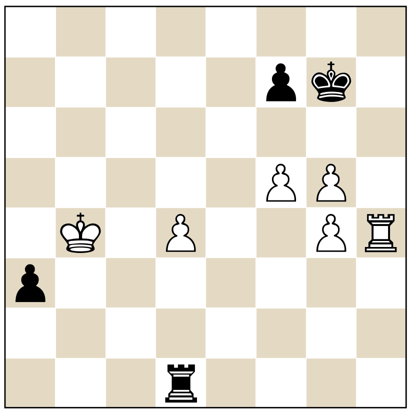


White is winning, but at least Black has become active, and after taking either b2 or g2, he can create a passed pawn of his own.

41.♖h6?

Now it actually becomes tricky. Simple was 41.♔c5!, combining threats against Black's queenside pawns with advancing his own d-pawn, which wins easily.

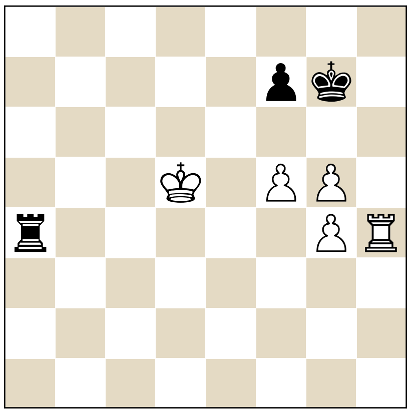
41...♖xb2 42.♖xh4 ♖b3 43.♔c5 ♖xc3+ 44.♔xb5 ♖xa3 45.f5 ♖a1 46.♔b4 a3 47.g4 ♖d1!



White may have missed several wins, which is understandable in a blitz game. Now, however, it seems to be a certain draw, as Kramnik sacrifices his main trump, the passed pawn, getting White's d-pawn in exchange and forcing a kind of fortress-like situation in which White, despite his two extra pawns, cannot make any progress.

48.♔xa3 ♖xd4 49.♔b3 ♖f4 50.♔c3 ♖a4 51.♔d3 ♖a3+ 52.♔c4 ♖a4+ 53.♔b5 ♖f4 54.♔c6 ♖a4 55.♔d6 ♖a6+

56.♔c7 ♖a7+ 57.♔b6 ♖a4 58.♔b5 ♖f4 59.♔c5 ♖a4 60.♔c6 ♖b4 61.♔d5 ♖a4 62.♔e5 ♖a5+ 63.♔d6 ♖a6+ 64.♔c5 ♖a4 65.♔c6 ♖b4 66.♔d5 ♖a4



And here the players agreed a draw.

■ ■ ■

The revelation in the first two GCT legs was Wesley So. The American particularly impressed in the rapid section in Leuven, where he finished second, half a point behind Magnus Carlsen. In the blitz section he had to settle for fifth place, but in the overall standings of the Grand Chess Tour the grandmaster from Minnesota is in shared second place with Hikaru Nakamura.

And if we are not counting Magnus Carlsen, who after all will not be included in the final standings of the Tour, the two Americans are even leading.

Here is Wesley So's personal account of his performance in Leuven.

NOTES BY

Wesley So

RE 7.1 – A11
Fabiano Caruana
Wesley So
Leuven rapid 2016 (5)

The Great News: I was included in the Grand Chess Tour and the first legs would be held in France and Belgium. I'd heard whispers about how exciting this Tour was going to be, and the result was definitely beyond anyone's expectations. Example: the venue in Leuven was their 15th-century City Hall, and the opening ceremony featured a dinner cooked by a Michelin Star chef. In France, the venue was the beautiful Maison de la Chimie, and the opening ceremony was held on the landscaped rooftop of the Vivendi headquarters, almost next to the Arc de Triomphe. Right now, I want to thank Jan Callewaert of Your Next Move, in Belgium, and the sponsors from Vivendi and Daily Motion in France. Our sponsors made us feel like movie stars. Thanks also to the hundreds of chess fans who filled every seat, every day, in each city. They were amazing.

Okay, now for the Not So Great News. The format for each leg was a combination of Rapid and Blitz. I would be the lowest-rated player, since I hadn't played this format (other than in playoffs) in many years. As for my blitz... well let's just say FIDE had me listed as 'inactive'.

Was I nervous? As they say here in Minnesota: youbetcha!

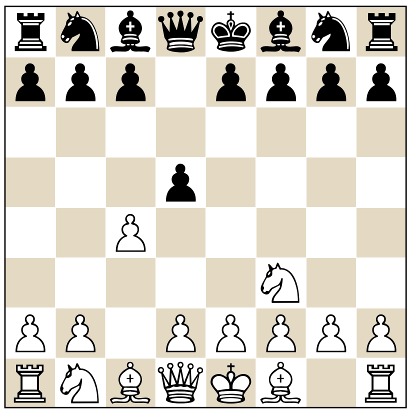
Needless to say, each of the three different time-formats of chess require a different strategy, and classical chess is more comfortable for me. What to do? Of course I buckled down to work on both other time-controls, but a couple of months is not enough to catch up to guys at this level. I put on a brave face, but in my heart I knew I would have to step carefully through this minefield.

This was a typical game for me during the rapid tournament in Leuven: long, drawn-out manoeuvring with a blitzing finish as each player tried desperately to outsmart the other. I quickly learned that in rapid and blitz, opening preparation was just less important than in classical. Look at most of the games. A good example would be those by Fabiano and Kramnik, who in a majority of their games started successfully with 1.♘f3 + 2.g3 or 2.b3 ... openings you rarely see them use.

When my turn came to face Fabiano, it was useless to try and predict whether Fabiano would start with his usual 1.e4. And of course he didn't.

1.♘f3 d5 1...c5 2.e4 transposes to the Sicilian, of which Fabiano is an expert.

2.c4



2...c6

An invitation to a Slav.

2...d4 was played by Vishy two rounds earlier. Their game continued 3.b4 f6 4.e3 e5 5.c5 a5 6.♕a4+ ♗d7 7.b5 ♗xc5 8.♗c4 ♗g4? – 8...♘e7! – 9.♗xg8!, and because of the ♕c4 fork White won a piece. Vishy kept fighting and managed to save half a point (Caruana-Anand, Leuven rapid 2016).

3.♕b3

No more theory! I was definitely on my own here, as I hadn't checked 3.♕b3 for at least two years.

3...♘f6

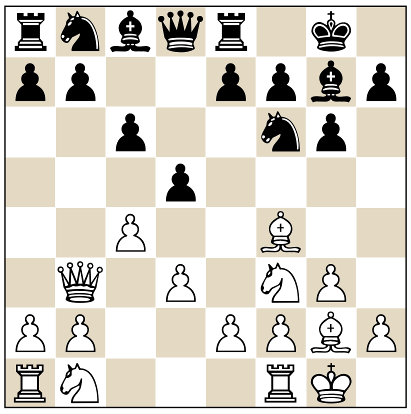
I just continued my natural development and invited him again to a Slav by letting him play 4.d4.

I considered a few options here, but not 3...g6 4.d4 ♗g7 5.e3 or 5.♘c3. I don't like this structure for Black, as his bishop on g7 is locked in by White's d4-e3-pawn wall.

4.g3 g6 5.♗g2 ♗g7 6.0-0 0-0

This time I invited him to go for the Grünfeld with 7.d4. Chess is such a flexible game!

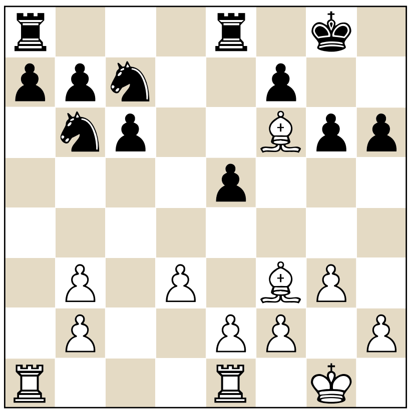
7.d3 ♖e8 8.♗f4



NEW IN CHESS

Wesley So: 'I put on a brave face, but in my heart I knew I would have to step carefully through this minefield.'

8...d4 I was surprised to find out later that Fabiano had played this exact variation against Magnus in a blitz game. He chose 8...♘bd7 9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♗d2 e5 11.♘c3 ♘c7 12.♘e4 ♘b6 13.♗g5 ♕d5 14.♘f6+? (14.♕xd5! is better, when White gets the bishop pair with either ♘d6 or ♘f6 next, and a slightly better endgame) 14...♗xf6 15.♗xf6 ♕xb3 16.axb3 ♗g4! 17.♖fe1 (17.♗xe5 ♗xf3 18.♗xc7 ♗xg2 19.♔xg2 ♘d5 is painful, too) 17...♗xf3 18.♗xf3 h6.

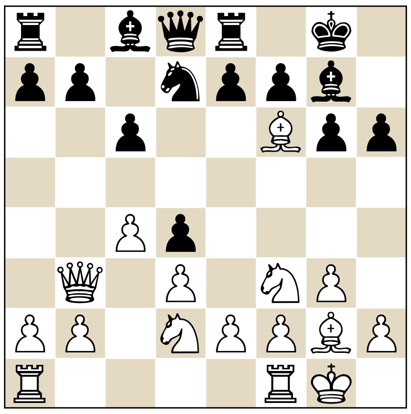

ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

It's not easy to free the bishop on f6, and Black played perfectly to win (Caruana-Carlsen, Leuven rapid 2016).

9.♘bd2 ♘bd7

9.♘bd2 was too hasty. Now the bishop on f4 has limited options. Perhaps 9.e3 is better.

10.♗g5 h6 11.♗xf6



11...♘xf6

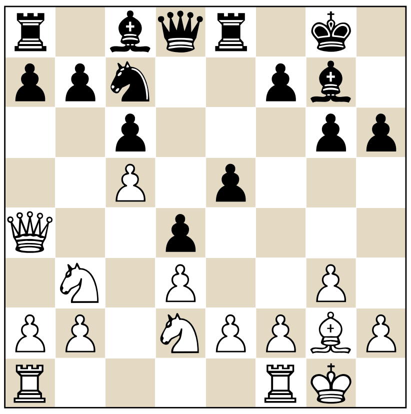
11...exf6! was my first choice. In compensation for the doubled-pawns I can put pressure on the e-file, have a nice spot on c5 for my knight and the a3-f8 diagonal for my dark-squared bishop. White is not advised to take on d4 because of ...♘c5, followed by ...♘a4.

12.c5 I still have a fine position here, but Fabiano played very well in the next series of moves.

12...♘d5 I did not want to weaken the d6-square with 12...e5 13.♘c4, but apparently 13...e4, maybe followed by ...e3 and an attack, is good for Black. **13.♕a4 ♘c7**

I was a little confused at this stage, as the position is very original and I didn't have a clear plan. So I just kept on manoeuvring, while running ideas through my head...

14.♘b3 e5 15.♘fd2



Now it's becoming clear. White's idea is to put his knights on e4 and c4 somehow, getting a firmer grip. I kept on manoeuvring.

15...♗d7 15...♗f8 might be better, since the bishop belongs on this diagonal. **16.♘a5 ♖b8** Now I have some ideas of breaking out with ...b6 or ...b5 eventually, but his next move discouraged that idea. **17.♖ac1** On 17.♘dc4 ♗f8 keeps my position together.

17...♘e6!?

Provoking him to go for b4.

18.b4 ♘c7 Now I get the c3-square for my knight after ♘b5.

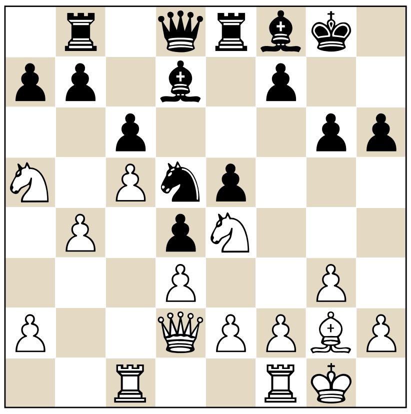
19.♘e4 ♗f8

19...♘b5 20.♕c2 is premature, as he can kick my knight with a4.

20.♕c2 ♘d5

20...f5 21.♘d2 ♕f6 is preferable, and given more time I would have played it. During the game I did not want to unnecessarily over-extend the pawns in front of my king.

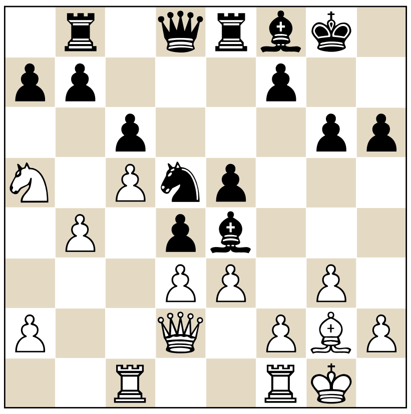
21.♕d2



21...♗f5 Seeing his other knight coming to c4, I panicked a little. Black should have better options here, such as 21...♕c7 22.♘c4 b5.

But not 21...f5?! 22.♘d6 ♗xd6 23.♗xd5+ cxd5 24.cxd6, when with ♖c7 and the pawn on h6 hanging, Black is in trouble.

22.e3 ♗xe4



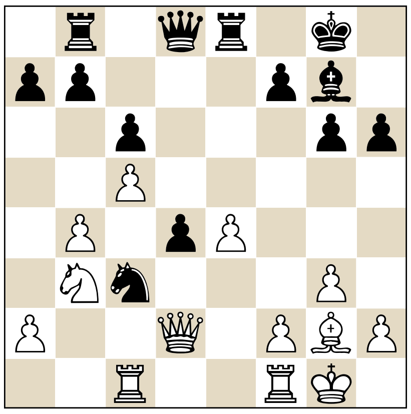
23.dxe4! An unpleasant surprise. Fortunately I correctly assessed that giving him the doubled pawns would be bad for me.

23...♘c3!

23...dxe3 24.fxe3 ♘c7 25.♖cd1 would be unpleasant. White controls both open files, his bishop will be more active than mine on h3, and my knight on c7 has no outposts.

24.♘b3 ♗g7 24...b6!, with the idea of 25.f4 a5, is fine for Black, according to the engine.

25.exd4 exd4



26.♖fe1

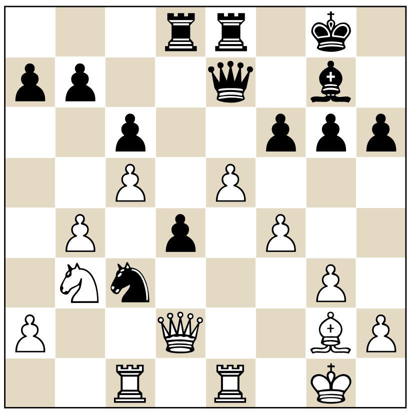
Yikes. Fabiano manages to stabilize his position and now threatens to cut off my knight's lifeline with f4-e5.

26...♕e7 27.f4

27.♘xd4 ♖bd8 28.♕xc3 ♖xd4 29.e5 ♕d7 is unpleasant defending, but the opposite-coloured bishops give Black drawing chances.

27...♖bd8 28.e5 Better was 28.♘a5!.

28...f6

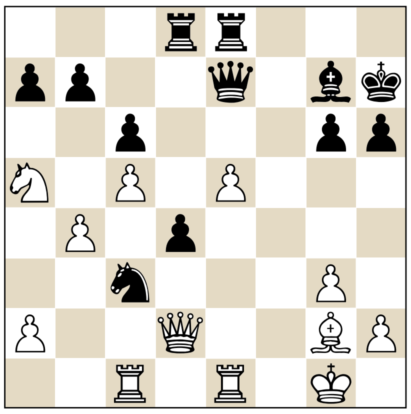


29.♘a5?! I won't say this is a mistake, but here Fabiano started overstepping his limits. He was getting low on time, too, so not capturing my d4-pawn is risky to say the least.

29.♘xd4 fxe5 30.♕xc3 exd4 31.♕b3+ ♕f7 32.♕d3 should be close to a draw, but with the queens on the board I have to be careful about the safety of my king.

29...fxe5 30.fxe5 ♔h7

I cannot take on e5 here, because after ♘c4 and the forcing variation that follows, he could take my rook on d8 with check and win.



Here Fabiano saw that after 31.♘c4 ♕g5 he would be unable to avoid the queen swap, hence: **31.h4?** Which is just a blunder.

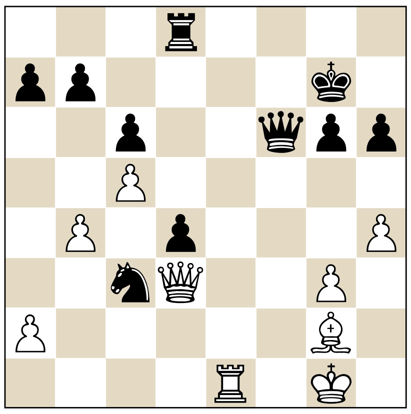
31...♗xe5

31...h5 is even better, but it's kind of hard to see the difference with only a few minutes left on the clock.

32.♘c4 ♕g7 33.♘xe5 ♖xe5 34.♖xe5 ♕xe5 35.♖e1

Now 35.♖xc3 dxc3 36.♕xd8 does not come with check, and 36...c2 simply promotes the pawn: 37.♕d7+ ♕g7 38.♕d2 ♕a1+, and wins.

35...♕f6 36.♕d3 ♔g7?!

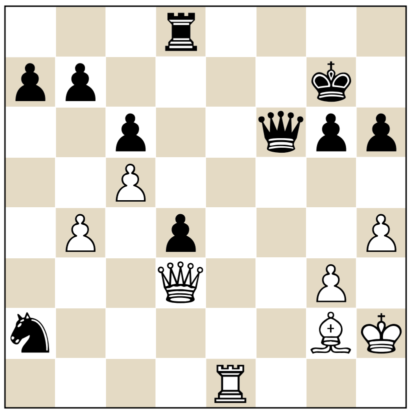


37.♔h2 37.♗h3! suddenly creates deadly counterplay. ♖e6, followed by h5, whips up a serious mating attack, so 37...h5 (37...♕f7 38.h5 gxh5 39.♖e6, with the threat of ♕d2!) 38.♖e6 ♕f7, but with such active white pieces it is clear Black will be unable to make progress.

37.a3 ♖d7, and Black can make small improvements to his position with ...♖f7 or ...h5.

37...♘xa2!

With both of us short of time (especially Fabiano), I decided to take my chances and grab the free pawn! It worked perfectly in this game, but if we had been playing a classical game, I doubt very much that I would have taken on a2.



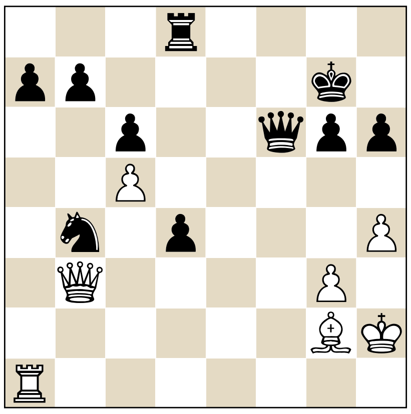
38.♖a1?

This throws away the game, but being two pawns down and having little time on the clock would put any player under serious pressure.

38.b5 is better, when White will regain one of the pawns on b7 or c6.

Black is better, but the most likely result would be a draw.

38...♘xb4 39.♕b3



39...a5!

I spent the major part of my remaining time on this move.

One thing we have to avoid is 39...d3? 40.♖f1, when the tables are suddenly turned: 40...♕d4 41.♖f4, and the d3-pawn is not going anywhere.

40.♖xa5

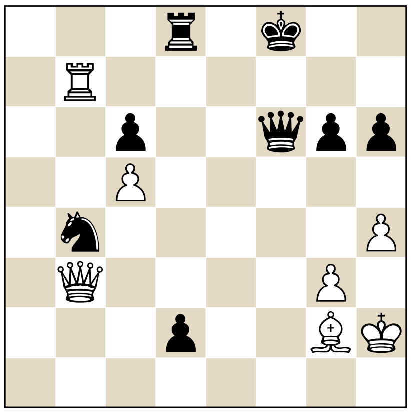
40.♖f1 ♕e7 leaves White three pawns down.

40...d3 Now my passed pawn is all set to queen!

41.♖a7

41.♕xb4 d2 42.♕xb7+ ♔f8 also loses, since my queen is guarding a1.

41...d2 42.♖xb7+ ♔f8



43.♕e3

43.♖xb4 d1♕ 44.♕xd1 ♖xd1 45.♖f4 ♕xf4 46.gxf4 ♖c1 should be a technical win.

43...d1♕?

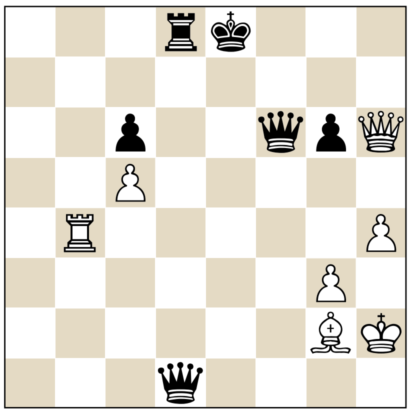
Too hasty. I was looking at 43...g5, but then I decided to just get my two queens.

43...g5! first wins easily. My queen on f6 holds everything together, and White has no attack.

44.♕xh6+ ♔e8

Here Fabiano had less than a minute left and missed a draw.

45.♖xb4?



We had both missed 45.♕e3+, which clearly leads to perpetual check. The problem is that while attacking, you are liable to miss retreating moves.

45...♕d2!

The cleanest win. In addition to everything, I have his bishop pinned and immobilized now.

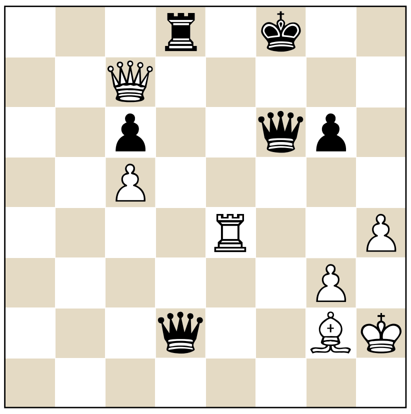
46.♖e4+ ♔f7 47.♕h7+

47.♕xd2 ♖xd2 48.♖f4 ♕xf4 49.gxf4 ♖c2 is an easy win.

47.♖f4 is met by 47...♔g8!.

47...♔f8

While he was thinking, I saw that ...♕xg2+ would lead to mate, so immediately after his next move **48.♕c7**



I played **48...♕xg2+ 49.♔xg2 ♖d2+ 50.♔h3 ♕f1+** And mate on f5. White resigned.

This game was important for the overall standings, as Fabiano was leading with 3/4 (or 6/8 – in the rapid section you got double points), and this enabled me to catch up with him.

NOTES BY

Wesley So

SI 3.7 – B55

Wesley So

Veselin Topalov

Leuven blitz 2016 (7)

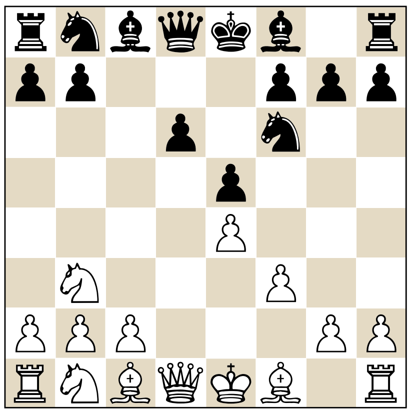
1.e4 c5

Many people seem to go for the Sicilian against me, and I should make a note to myself to work on it. This blitz game was no exception. The theory of the Sicilian is still growing rapidly, and the assessment of its many lines regularly changes. It is clear, though, that Veselin had come well-prepared for the Grand Chess Tour. If you take a look at his black games, you will see that he goes for theoretical debates in the majority of his games.

2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.f3!?

An interesting sideline. But the main idea is to catch Black by surprise. He should have at least two, if not three, variations to equalize. My own idea is that this being a blitz game, I want to get an interesting position while avoiding Topalov's huge experience in the Sicilian main lines.

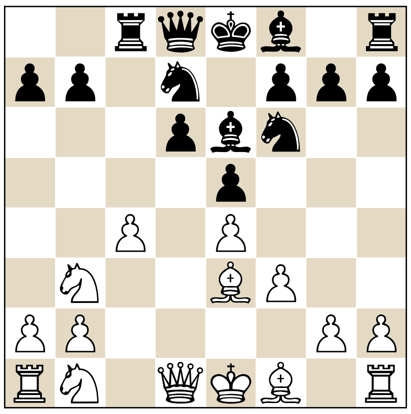
5...e5 6.♘b3



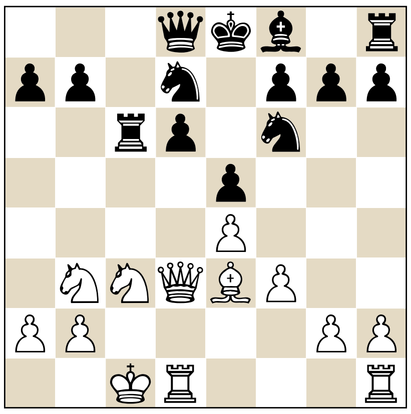
6...♗e6 I remember Nakamura playing 6...a5 in online blitz. His opponent went 7.c4? ♘xe4! 8.fxe4 ♕h4+ 9.♔d2 a4, and the b3-knight was trapped! This is a well-known trick. White has to go 7.♘c3 or 7.♗b5+ instead.

7.c4 ♘bd7 8.♗e3 ♖c8

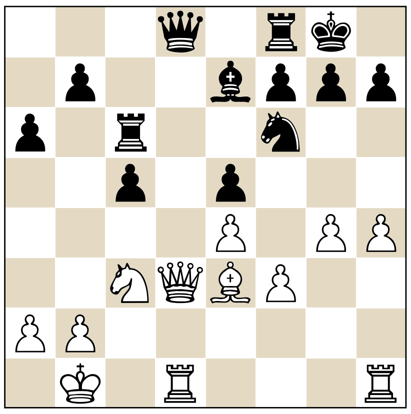
Veselin goes for the main line, but here I have an idea.



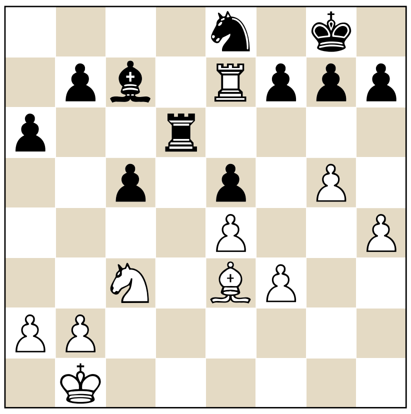
9.♘c3!
I just sacrifice the c4-pawn. It's not a novelty, though. There are 25 games with this position in my database.
9.♘a3 a6 leaves the knight on a3 sidelined.
9...♗xc4
9...♘b6 10.♘a5! works well for White. Or 9...♗e7 10.♘b5.
10.♗xc4 ♖xc4 11.♕d3 ♖c6
This looks like the most natural retreat for the rook.
11...♖c8 is a possible option.
12.0-0-0 I do not want to waste time with 12.♗xa7 b6, and analysis shows that Black is doing well here.
12.g4 might be better, though, to avoid 12...h5.



12...♗e7
12...h5! is a strong move and clearly the best. If 13.h3 h4, White cannot make progress on the kingside.
13.g4 0-0 14.♔b1 a6
14...b6 15.h4 ♘c5 16.♘xc5 bxc5 17.h5 is clearly better for White.
15.h4
I wanted to go for h5 and then g5 to create a powerful kingside attack. Here I was already very happy with my opening choice.
15...♘c5
Hitting the emergency button to trade pieces. 15...b5 16.g5 ♘h5 17.♘d5 gives White firm control.
16.♘xc5 dxc5



17.♕xd8?! Here I totally forgot about 17.g5 for control of the d-file, e.g. 17...♘h5 18.♕d7!.
17...♖xd8 18.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 19.♖d1 ♗c7?!
19...♗e7! 20.g5 ♘e8 21.♖d7 ♖c7!, and I will be unable to win back my pawn.
20.g5 ♘e8 21.♖d7 ♖d6
21...♔f8 22.♘d5 creates an almost decisive bind.
22.♖e7

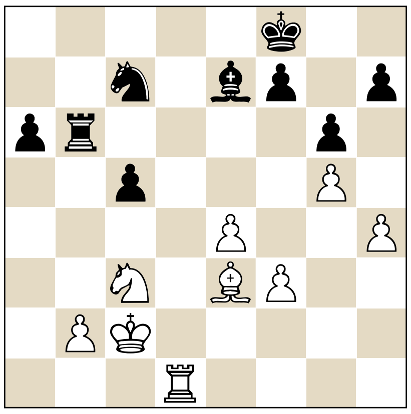


22...♔f8? Veselin started making mistakes here, but hey, it's blitz!
22...♖e6 23.♖xe6 fxe6 24.♗xc5 ♔f7 should be equal, since Black has sufficient counterplay on the kingside.
23.♖xe5 b6 23...♖d3 24.♗xc5+ is check! **24.♔c2 g6 25.a4**
I managed to end up with a clear endgame advantage. I have an outpost on d5 and more active pieces. His e8-knight in particular would take a lot of time to get to a good square.
25...♖c6 If 25...♘g7 then 26.a5.
26.♖d5 ♗d6 27.♖d1
Preparing to meet ...♔e7 with ♘d5+ and ...♘c7 with a5!.

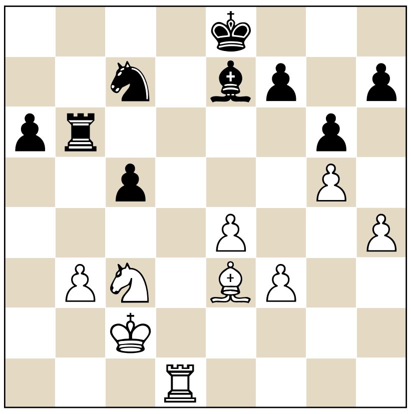
NEW IN CHESS

Leuven Town Hall, the magnificent venue of the Your Next Move Grand Chess Tour.

27...♘c7 28.a5! ♗e7 28...♔e8! was Black's best defence. **29.axb6 ♖xb6**

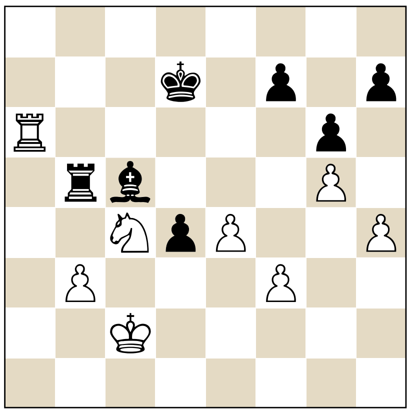


30.b3 Missing 30.♖d8+!!. **30...♔e8** Veselin starts playing almost planlessly. This usually doesn't work, as I have experienced many times myself. 30...♖c6 was better, with the idea of ...c4 to trade the queenside pawns.



31.♖a1 ♔d7?! 32.♘a4 ♖b5 32...♖c6 33.♘b2 slightly favours White. **33.♘b2 ♔e8?! 34.♘c4 ♔d7?! 35.♗f4** 35.f4, with the idea of rolling over the kingside pawns, would be even more brutal.

35...♘e6 36.♗e5 Winning the a-pawn. **36...♘d4+ 37.♗xd4 cxd4 38.♖xa6 ♗c5**



Here Veselin noticed that he had lost on time, just as I was about to play 39.♘e5+.

Even though he was not in top form in Leuven, Veselin showed great sportsmanship and was very friendly and approachable to everyone. He also showed superb fighting spirit in every game, playing for a win with both colours. Let's hope he will bounce back in his next tournament.

Now that all is said and done, I can say that I am happy. I entered these tournaments very apprehensively, slightly worried about rust on my skill set. In the end, I took fourth in Paris and second in Leuven. Of course, every player's goal should be to finish first, but even when you play hard for those wins, losses and draws have a nasty habit of getting in the way. That's chess. That's life.

■ ■ ■

Leuven rapid 2016		cat. XXII	
			TPR
1	Carlsen	6	2910
2	So	5½	2874
3	Anand	5	2837
4	Aronian	5	2835
5	Caruana	4½	2790
6	Vachier-Lagrave	4	2749
7	Giri	4	2750
8	Topalov	4	2752
9	Nakamura	3½	2712
10	Kramnik	3½	2710

Leuven blitz 2016		cat. XXII	
			TPR
1	Carlsen	11	2865
2	Aronian	10	2835
3	Anand	9½	2815
4	Nakamura	9½	2813
5	So	9½	2815
6	Kramnik	9	2790
7	Vachier-Lagrave	9	2792
8	Caruana	8½	2769
9	Giri	8	2750
10	Topalov	6	2670

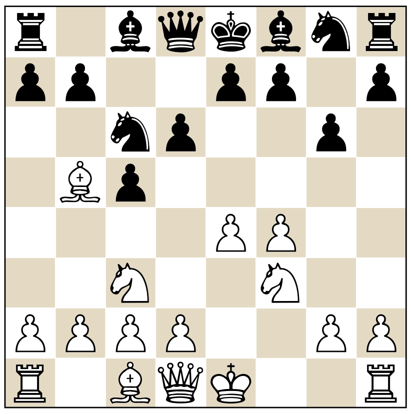
Let's finish with one more blitz game from Leuven. Anish Giri didn't do too well in the Your Next Move blitz, but by way of consolation he managed to beat Magnus Carlsen 1½-½. Here is the game that he won.

NOTES BY

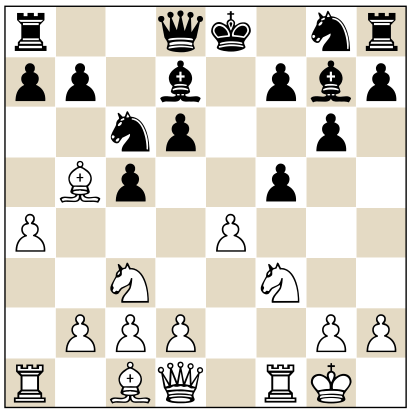
Anish Giri

SI 49.3 – B23
Magnus Carlsen
Anish Giri
Leuven blitz 2016 (16)

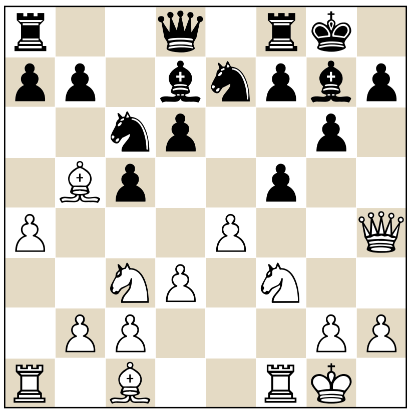
1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 d6 3.f4 Having won the tournament already, Magnus decided to give a shot at trying to humiliate me in the Grand Prix Attack. **3...♘c6 4.♘f3 g6 5.♗b5**



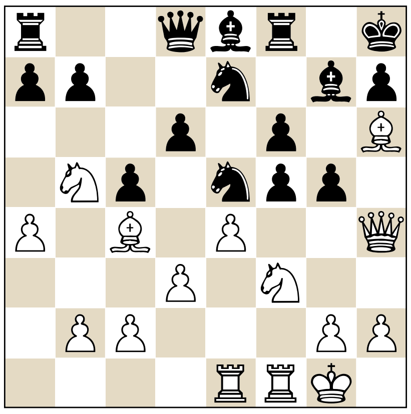
The point of this move is to provoke 5...♗d7. Later on, after ...e6 and ...♘ge7, White goes f5, when in some lines the d6-pawn will hang after ♗f4 and ♘b5. **5...♗d7 6.a4!?** This is not how they usually play it. 6.♗c4 is how they do it, but Magnus wanted to get a better version of this. **6...♗g7 7.0-0 e6 8.f5 exf5**



9.d3?
Magnus wanted to mate me in textbook style, following a famous scheme, but I guess this only worked in our childhood. In real life, those mating schemes are not that simple. 9.exf5 was a good way to use the unique features of this particular position. This was also what I had expected. Now, after 9...♗xf5 10.d4!, I would have to see how to solve my problems.
9...♘ge7 10.♕e1 0-0 11.♕h4



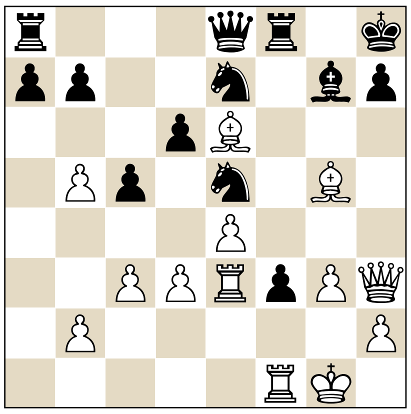
11...f6!
Now it's clear that there is almost no compensation for the sacrificed pawn.
12.♗c4+ ♔h8 13.♘b5 ♗e8 14.♗h6 ♘e5 15.♖ae1 g5



Asking for a piece sac, but it's clear that if it came, it would be desperation.
16.♘xg5 fxg5 17.♗xg5 ♘5g6 18.♕h3 f4
The rest is a matter of converting, which is never a simple matter in blitz.
19.g3 ♗xb5 20.axb5 f3 21.c3 ♕e8 22.♗e6 ♘e5 23.♖e3
I suddenly ran out of moves, but then decided to slowly but surely activate my last non-participating piece.

NEW IN CHESS

Jan Callewaert presented Magnus Carlsen with the winner's trophy in Leuven.

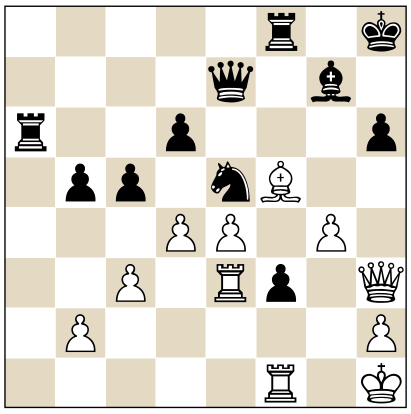


23...b6!? Here 23...a6 24.b6 a5 was another amusing way to do so: 25.♔h1 a4. **24.♔h1 a6 25.bxa6 ♖xa6 26.g4 b5**

Grand Chess Tour 2016
Standings after Paris and Leuven

			TPR
1	Magnus Carlsen	23	$67,500
2	Hikaru Nakamura	17	$45,000
2	Wesley So	17	$45,000
4	Levon Aronian	14	$30,000
5	Maxime Vachier-Lagrave	13	$22,000
6	Fabiano Caruana	9	$22,500
7	Anish Giri	7½	$15,000
8	Vishy Anand	7	$15,000
9	Vladimir Kramnik	6½	$15,000
10	Veselin Topalov	3	$15,000

Just making some moves quickly. By this point Magnus had pretty much no compensation left, and no time either.
27.♗xe7 ♕xe7 28.♗f5 h6 29.d4



The rest is already seriously easy.
29...cxd4 30.cxd4 ♘c6 31.g5 ♘xd4 32.gxh6 ♗e5 33.♕h5 ♖a2 34.♖exf3 ♘xf3 35.♖xf3 ♖g8 36.♗g6 ♖a1+ 37.♔g2 ♕e6 38.♖g3 ♗xg3 39.♗f7 ♕xe4+
White resigned. Not a bad way to hit the finishing line of a bad tournament, but I guess I hadn't spoiled Carlsen's mood to much, since there was already no way for anyone to catch him. Finally, a little disclaimer: I have annotated two crushing wins against Magnus in this article, but omitted two other games against him with the opposite result. ☺. ■

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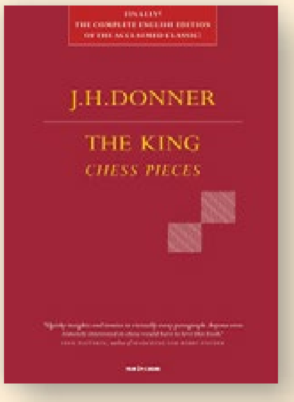
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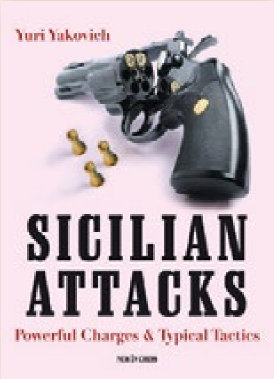
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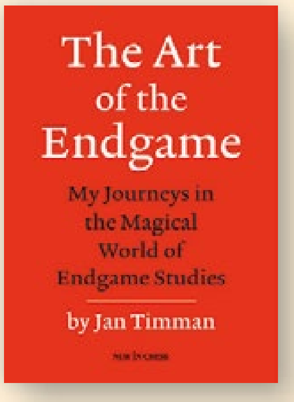
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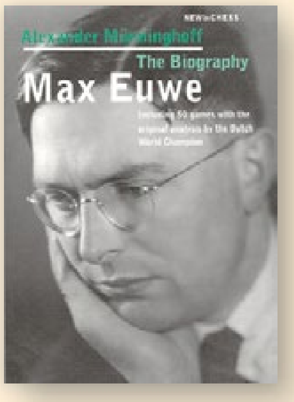
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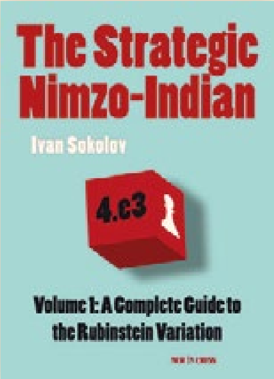
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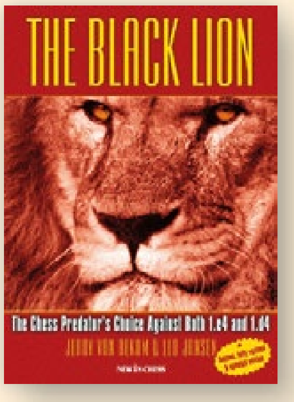
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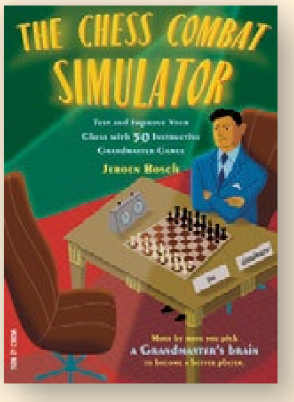
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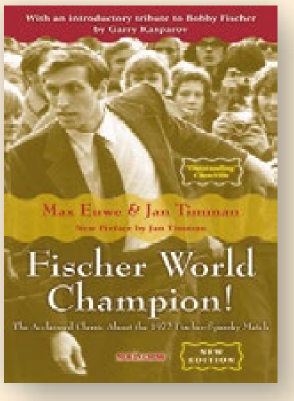
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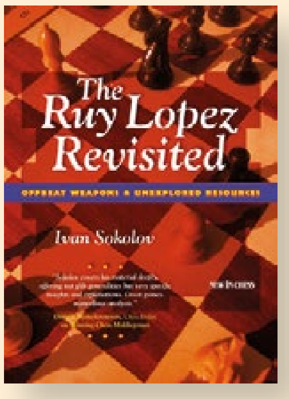
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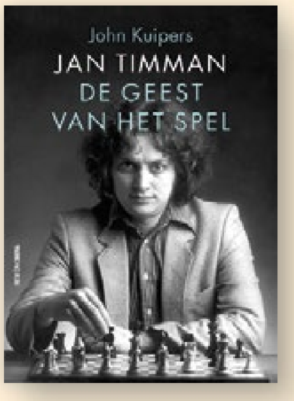
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A Lifetime

V. KORTSJNOI

No signs yet of the drama ahead. Viktor Kortchnoi picks his number at the drawing of lots of the 1976 IBM tournament. Two weeks later he cut the knot and took a decision that not only dramatically changed his own life, but also determined the future of chess.

Burning

Five years ago Viktor Kortchnoi presented him with a copy of his best games collection with the dedication: 'To Nestor the Chronicler, from one of the people closest to him worthy of an obituary.' Now, after Kortchnoi's death on June 6 at the age of 85, **GENNA SOSONKO** has written the requested memoir, a moving tribute, personal and profound, to an all-time great. 'Fate blessed me with a close relationship not only with a great chess player, but also with one of the most extraordinary people in the history of our game.'

'What should I do? What should I do? I was in the midst of a simultaneous exhibition in The Hague, but I had not yet taken a final decision. I could have calmly gone to the reception and the simul at the Soviet Embassy, returned to Leningrad the next day and tried another time. What did Miles say to me "politicheskoe ubezhishche" would be in English? "Political asylum." Easy to say. At last the simul ended, I said goodbye to the organizers and the taxi arrived. The taxi driver is already asking me "Where would you like to go?" But I don't know. I don't know. And only when he repeated his question did I say: "Amsterdam!" The next day I requested political asylum in Holland.'

In these words Viktor Kortchnoi described to me his confused state of mind and the decision he took on 25 July 1976. A decision that not only dramatically change his own life, but also determined the future of chess for years ahead.

Today, 40 years on, it's not easy to understand what a decision like that meant for a citizen of the USSR, and how incredibly hard it was for him to take that last leap to freedom. After all, henceforth in his own country he automatically became a traitor and a renegade, as it was with everyone who refused to return from abroad in those years: Rudolf Nureyev, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Natalia Makarova, Liudmila Belousova and Oleg Protopopov, to name a few.

Kortchnoi was not the first world class Grandmaster to have left Russia and end up in the West. When Alekhine and Bogoljubow in the 1930s played for the world title, in the Soviet Union one of them was ironically called 'a Frenchman', and the other 'a German', but both of them were described as 'renegades who sold their talent for a mess of pottage in the bourgeois heaven'. Still, when they wrote about them, Soviet media pointed out: 'It shouldn't be forgotten that in politics the former Soviet champions are mere pigmies, while in chess they are the outstanding luminaries of the contemporary world.' And they printed reports about their matches, published articles about their tournaments, and commented on their games.

In the 1970s in the Soviet Union the situation was quite different. If the authorities put various hurdles in the way of legal emigration (if they allowed it at all), they treated those who left the country in an utterly uncompromising manner. Just as in Roman times, the names of those who fell out of favour were removed from all public records, and a person who did not return to the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Biographical facts were changed, successes were ignored, and the authorities went to great lengths to avoid even mentioning the person's name. In the language of George Orwell, they were 'vaporized'.

In newspaper articles, in radio and TV broadcasts, he was usually referred to as a faceless 'opponent' or 'Candidate', while in official statements he was termed 'traitor' or 'renegade'.

However, even against this background, what happened with Kortchnoi was something special. After all chess in 'the country of victorious socialism' was the nation's favourite game, followed ardently by millions, and Kortchnoi's name was known to everyone. Very often those who ended up outside the Soviet Union were in no sense political opponents of the regime or dissidents in the strict meaning of the word. Their break with the system was dictated by the very logic of their creativity. The authoritarian regime was simply too restrictive for them, and because of that they left the Soviet Union or were forced to take this step. That is how it was with Viktor Kortchnoi, although his very presence outside the country was far less palatable for the authorities than for example that of Solzhenitsyn or Brodsky, Rostropovich or Tarkovsky. The names of these prominent artists need not be mentioned, their books need not published, their concerts ignored and their films banned. Kortchnoi, on the other hand, who regularly met with Soviet chess players across the chess board, in Candidates and World Championship matches, evoked the authorities' extreme fury and con-

Enjoying freedom to the full. Viktor and Petra Kortchnoi at the after-party of the 1987 SWIFT tournament in Brussels.

CATHERINE JAEG

SERGEY SOROKHIN

Time and political changes can heal wounds. In 1999 Viktor Kortchnoi met with a warm welcome when he returned to St. Petersburg for a lecture.

tinually reminded millions of his former fellow-citizens of his existence. These matches turned into political shows with scandals, mutual accusations, psychic mediums and hypnotizers. They became, as in the time of Spassky and Fischer, a symbol of the confrontation between the Soviet Union and the West. A special poignancy derived from the fact that a former Soviet citizen had now become a representative of the West. In newspaper articles, in radio and TV broadcasts, he was usually referred to as a faceless 'opponent' or 'Candidate', while in official statements he was termed 'traitor' or 'renegade'. But for the very reason that his name was not printed and was pronounced only in a whisper, it sounded louder within the country than any fanfares. The 'villain' Kortchnoi made chess a matter of state importance, and during World Championship matches the leaders of the Soviet Union would demand direct reports, like communiqués from the battlefield.

Meeting again

I was living in Amsterdam when Viktor phoned me in 1973 from Germany, where he was playing a training match with Robert Hübner. It was the first time he called me after I had started my new life in the Netherlands. In 1974, after his match against Mecking in Augusta, I received a letter from the USA.

'Genna! First of all, I congratulate you on your success in the international tournament (I had made my debut in the Wijk aan Zee top group and done well – GS). As for me, it was not easy and I needed some luck to overcome this rather uncouth genius. But it all turned out OK, although I haven't played that badly for a long time. You intrigued me when we spoke on the phone. I'm interested in what you are doing, even if it's not a refutation of this line in the Catalan opening. Our relations now are very *subtile*, if I can use this French word to accurately describe our somewhat unusual relationship. I understand that life for you now has other foundations. That's why – don't be surprised – if you haven't used your refutation yet, I am ready to buy it from you. The product in question is an unusual one and could prove useful, both for me and for you. I would assess its nominal value in terms of the average pay for about two simultaneous exhibitions at your level, in other words 350 guilders. I am ready to pay you when I get the material from you. If I can apply this new approach successfully, the payment will naturally increase – tentatively twofold, that I will pay you in the future. If, on the contrary, it turns out to be useless, I'll ask you to do some other work for me... Everything, as you see, on gentlemen's terms, but so far neither of us has really let the other down. So I hope you'll agree to send me your manuscript, send it with Walter's letter. All the best! Looking forward to hearing from... Walter.' Signed 25 February, 1974.

The letter was a little strange, but it was clear that Kortchnoi was not against renewing our old collaboration, broken off by my emigration from the Soviet Union in 1972. Direct contact after that had become impossible, and it was for that very reason I was to put my response inside a letter from the Dutch chess player Walter Mooij, an acquaintance of both of us.

Like a great many people, while he was in the Soviet Union Kortchnoi viewed the authorities with some irony. Perhaps even more than others: after all he regularly travelled abroad and could compare both systems with his own eyes. Viktor brought banned literature home. Among the works I remember were Orwell's *1984*, *Animal Farm*, books by Vladimir Nabokov, and others.

There had been talk about leaving for the West in the Kortchnoi family, although this never really became concrete. On one occasion Kortchnoi's 13-year-old son, Igor, drew up lists which he showed his father, of school subjects – mathematics, physics, chemistry, languages, literature – indicating which were more in demand in the Soviet Union and which in the West. Another time, having remarked that his father was playing with a magnet on his key fob, Igor asked: 'Are you trying to find out which direction the West is in?'

When I spoke to him the other day, Kortchnoi junior recalled: ‘None of this went further than talk, and before the trip to Amsterdam my father told neither my mother nor me that he would not return from Holland.’

We met outside Russia for the first time at the 1974 Nice Olympiad. We saw each other several times, and so far as possible away from the hotel so that we would not be seen by those ‘accompanying’ the Soviet team. This is how Kortchnoi himself remembered these meetings in *Chess is my Life*: ‘In Nice I met an old acquaintance, my trainer in the Candidates matches from 1971, G.B. Sosonko. He was by that time already a Dutch citizen. We talked, and remembered Grandmasters who had already left the Soviet Union on Israeli visas. “Considering that the movement to exit the USSR is in dialectical development,” Sosonko said, “we have come to the conclusion that the next to leave the USSR will be...” “Oh, come on,” I cut him off, “we are so privileged, we are such important people in the USSR.” “However,” he replied, “taking into account all the chess and non-chess circumstances, you will realize that the next to leave will be...” I did not let him finish or name names. After all, without doubt, he had me in mind! I fought against this, I still thought of myself as a useful member of society. Just as I later fought in the match against Karpov, and for some time after the match against a society that no longer considered me useful... So what can one say, it seems Sosonko had the gift of foresight.’

At the end of the next year we met at Hastings. I already knew about the campaign against Kortchnoi that had been started in the Soviet Union. After losing the match against Karpov, Kortchnoi gave an interview to the Yugoslavian newspaper *Politika*, in which he spoke of the winner in very uncomplimentary terms, and most importantly let it be understood that his loss was the result of ‘pressure’ from above. The newspaper *Sovetsky Sport* responded with an article, ‘Not Sportsmanlike, Grandmaster’, and in almost every issue published readers’ letters condemning the presumptuous and arrogant behaviour of Kortchnoi, unacceptable for a Soviet sportsman.

‘Amalrik only smiled in response: ‘Why do you ask me when you’ve already made up your mind long ago...’

In January 1976, strolling on the windy seafront at Hastings, Kortchnoi made plans to emigrate. The first option was the only legal route at the time to leave the Soviet Union: to apply for an exit visa for himself and his family to go to Israel. The problems with such a plan were obvious: the procedures could be strung out over years, there was no certainty as to when and how it would end, and he would be deprived of the chance to play chess. There was no real enthusiasm for this option, although it was discussed. It obviously had little appeal for Viktor. As we would see in the case of Boris Gulko later, this route took seven whole years.

The second option would cut the Gordian Knot in one blow: to seek political asylum in the West while abroad at a tournament. The advantages of this route were obvious: all matters would immediately be resolved, and, most important for Kortchnoi, there would be no need to fear for his career. But this plan also had its problems, and they were considerable. Kortchnoi’s family would not be allowed to leave the USSR, and

For most of his life Viktor Kortchnoi was an inveterate smoker. He was already at an advanced age when, realizing its detrimental effects on his chess, he kicked the habit.

they would face an unbearable life as 'family members of a traitor to the motherland'. I told Viktor that when world famous ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev was trying to obtain permission for himself and his mother to leave the USSR, even a personal request to Brezhnev by the US President and the UK prime minister – let alone the support of ballet and theatre stars – had been fruitless. It was obvious that the same thing could happen to his own family. My predictions, alas, were to come true: Kortchnoi's son Igor spent two-and-a-half years in a prison camp for refusing military service, and for six years his family had a very difficult life in Leningrad.

No matter how strange it may seem, it was a third option, thought up by Kortchnoi himself, that was most intensively discussed. This involved asking Tito, the president of Yugoslavia, to permit him to settle in that country for a couple of years. Kortchnoi brought a letter to Tito with him. He liked this idea more than any others, and it cost me a lot of effort to dissuade him from this half-way step that could bring only unpleasantness. Without having taken any decision as to what to do, Kortchnoi passed on to me several copies of the *Informant* that had come with him to England, and left for home.

Six months later he arrived in Amsterdam. The IBM tournament was to be the last time he played under the flag with the Hammer and Sickle. On 5th July 1976, immediately after the opening of the tournament and the drawing of lots, Kortchnoi had a conversation with the president of FIDE, Max Euwe.

Viktor already spoke English well, but he was nervous and asked me to be present. Euwe understood everything at the first hint. 'Of course, Viktor', he said. 'You will keep all your rights in the Candidates matches. You must not worry, we shall help you.' Evidently, Euwe's friendly encouragement gave Kortchnoi confidence and pushed him into taking the decision.

Viktor Kortchnoi was proud that he had not only played against Grigory Levenfish, born in 1889, but also, in December 2004 in Drammen, against Magnus Carlsen, born in 1990. Kortchnoi won. In an equal position Carlsen's time ran out on move 40.

A few days later I left for Biel to take part in the Interzonal tournament. We spoke a few times on the phone. Once, pleased with the victory of the Columbian Oscar Castro over his arch-enemy Petrosian, Viktor asked me to pass on $100 to Castro, explaining that this was a 'reward.'

While in Biel I saw an interview Kortchnoi gave to *France-Presse*, and it prompted me to phone him. In the interview he had talked about the erroneous decision of the Soviet leadership to boycott the Olympiad in Haifa that was to start in a few months, about the problems Spassky was facing in his home country, and about anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. I asked a rather rhetorical question: how did he think Moscow would react to such an interview? There was a long silence. But it was obvious he was already thinking about that question himself.

Before I left for the Interzonal tournament, I had passed on to Kortchnoi a number of addresses, including that of the well-known Dutch writer and Slavist Professor Karel van het Reve. Staying at the Professor's house at the same time was Andrei Amalrik, recently deported from the Soviet Union, who was the author of the book *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?* that had caused such a stir. Kortchnoi told me how he had asked Amalrik for advice, putting forward the arguments for and against returning to the Soviet Union. 'On the one hand,' he said, 'if I ask for political asylum, the life of my family will become unbearable. On the other hand, after my AFP interview it is very likely that I'll never be allowed out of the country again. And thirdly, I can no longer see myself living in the Soviet Union, and fourthly...' Amalrik listened to Kortchnoi without interrupting him. At the end, Viktor asked him: 'What would you do in my place?' Amalrik only smiled in response: 'Why do you ask me when you've already made up your mind long ago...'

During a day off at the tournament I went to Montreux with Dutch chess master Hans Bouwmeester, who had helped me in Biel. I had learnt that Vladimir Nabokov had been living in Montreux for many years, and I knew that each day Nabokov bought a newspaper at a kiosk next to the Montreux Palace Hotel. I

Viktor Kortchnoi and his second Genna Sosonko at the 1970 USSR Championship in Riga. Kortchnoi won.

hoped to meet Nabokov, a passionate chess lover, and even speak with him. But we didn't see the writer. Instead, at the kiosk, we saw newspaper headlines in various languages all announcing in large type: 'One more chooses freedom.'

Reckless

We met the day after I got back to Holland. Viktor was staying at the home of Walter Mooij, not far from Amsterdam, and from time to time he visited me. They were difficult times for him. I remember so well how, on one occasion, with an unshaven face and swollen eyes he shouted: 'You don't know me, Genna, I am not brave. I'm not brave at all! I'm reckless! Reckless!' Another time at my house he was once again very agitated. He looked out of the window and said he had already seen before the man standing at the entrance to the building on the opposite side of the road, that he was being followed, and he knew that for a fact. On his way home, he always asked me to accompany him to the train station – and not simply accompany him, but wait with him on the platform until the train came in. He had already heard how the Soviet authorities could settle accounts with defectors in those days, fears that were far from groundless. And these concerns were all the more real, given that somehow or other representatives of the Soviet embassy had indeed made contact with him. They had proposed a meeting in order, they said, to pass on letters from his family, to talk things over frankly. They told him they understood his problems, that his action was impulsive, and that not all was lost yet, and so on and so forth. I advised him not to meet them. After a statement put out by TASS, and then by the Chess Federation of the USSR, any meeting was meaningless and could only result in new complications. While I didn't succeed in dissuading him, at least he agreed not to meet them at the Soviet embassy, to make the presence of the Dutch authorities mandatory, and to insist any conversation be in English. While he took this advice, on other occasions, having heard me out, he would think things over for a while, but then always act exactly as he wished and in his own way.

He was given right of residence in Holland, but was refused political asylum. Later Kortchnoi explained this refusal in terms of the softened formulations of his motives used in his application, as suggested to him by the secretary general of FIDE, Ineke Bakker. I do not think this played any kind of role: Kortchnoi after all had not assumed the role of a political fighter, and had always stressed that he stayed in the West above all to continue his professional career: 'Many consider me a dissident. That's not the case. I simply wanted to play chess. And I fled from the Soviet Union because my career was under threat. I was not the one who began it all, it was the Soviet authorities that dragged me into this war. You can think of it like this: fighting against the USSR, I fought for myself.'

Despite the fact that with hindsight facts often suffer in the writing of history, Kortchnoi honestly said: 'If I had made a few better moves in the match against Karpov in 1974 [which he lost by the smallest of margins, 12½-11½ – GS], I would most likely have remained in the Soviet Union.' Another time he said that the real reason he left the USSR was that there were four officials in Leningrad who had hindered his career.

At first life was very difficult for him in the West, and that wasn't because he was already 45 years old. Like Robinson, who found himself on an island, he didn't begin a new life but tried to resurrect the old life to which he was accustomed. It was also difficult for Kortchnoi to give up views and beliefs that had deep roots. After all, it is one thing to leave the Soviet Union to take part in a foreign tournament for a couple of weeks, and quite another to live permanently in different conditions.

I recall how in the autumn of 1979, Jan Timman and I met a strange man in Amsterdam who looked in every way like a Soviet tourist who had got separated from their group. ‘Interesting,’ Jan said to me, ‘Where could Viktor have bought a hat and a coat like that?’

Chain-smoking man

I met Kortchnoi for the first time in 1956, exactly 60 years ago. In those days every autumn special chess events were held at the Leningrad Pioneer Palace, and well-known players who had gone there in their youth came back to give simultaneous exhibitions against the children. I happened to play against Spassky. When the game was over, I went up to watch another simul that was being given by a chain-smoking young man with very distinctive facial expressions.

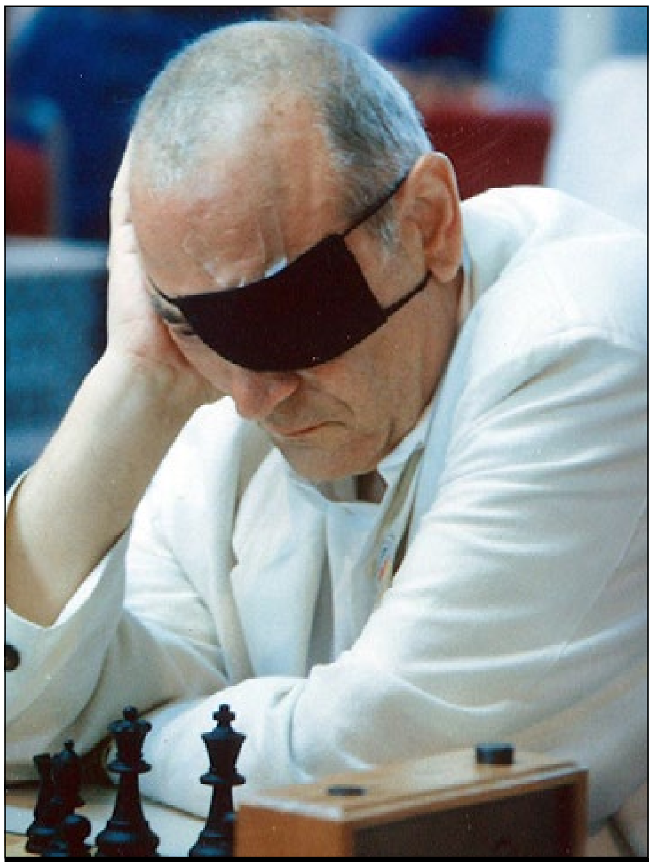
The boy, behind whose back I was standing, hadn’t decided what move to make, and asked permission to miss his turn. At that very moment Kortchnoi made an abrupt response, familiar to so many people that ever crossed his path, in reply to a proposal for a draw made by another of his young opponents. Kortchnoi said: ‘No!’

The next year again in the Pioneer Palace I played my first game against Kortchnoi in a clock simul, and I was absolutely delighted when the game ended in a draw. Fifty years later in November 2008 we played for the last time. This was at a tournament in Estonia, and that game also ended in a draw. The circle was complete. Within this circle was a Leningrad period when we were very close, and a period in the West when there were quarrels and very difficult relations. There was even a time when we lost touch altogether. All kinds of things happened. But there were also long days, weeks, months, spent playing in tournaments together, in conversation, and in analysis.

Viktor never disdained getting involved in variations or lines that many considered boring, or were not taken seriously. I well remember him saying in Leningrad: ‘They’ve suggested I get hold of a Bilguer (the legendary German opening manual last edited in 1916 by Schlechter – GS). They say there are a lot of interesting things in it. Would you like to look at a position I’ve found there, it is very interesting...’ On another occasion, in Leningrad before the start of our first training session, I told him I really knew only a couple of openings, and I didn’t know whether he would like them. I remember Kortchnoi’s answer very well: ‘Doesn’t matter, doesn’t matter,’ Viktor said, ‘I’m interested in everything.’

The members of the Swiss team, the players from the Volmac chess club in Rotterdam, and many others who analysed with him often heard him use this same phrase. Everything about chess interested him, and unlike many others he was always absolutely honest when it came to analysis. Honesty, at times verging on pitilessness in relation not only to his opponent, but to himself.

> ‘Chess was by far the most important thing in Kortchnoi’s life. It’s hard to say if there was something that came second.’

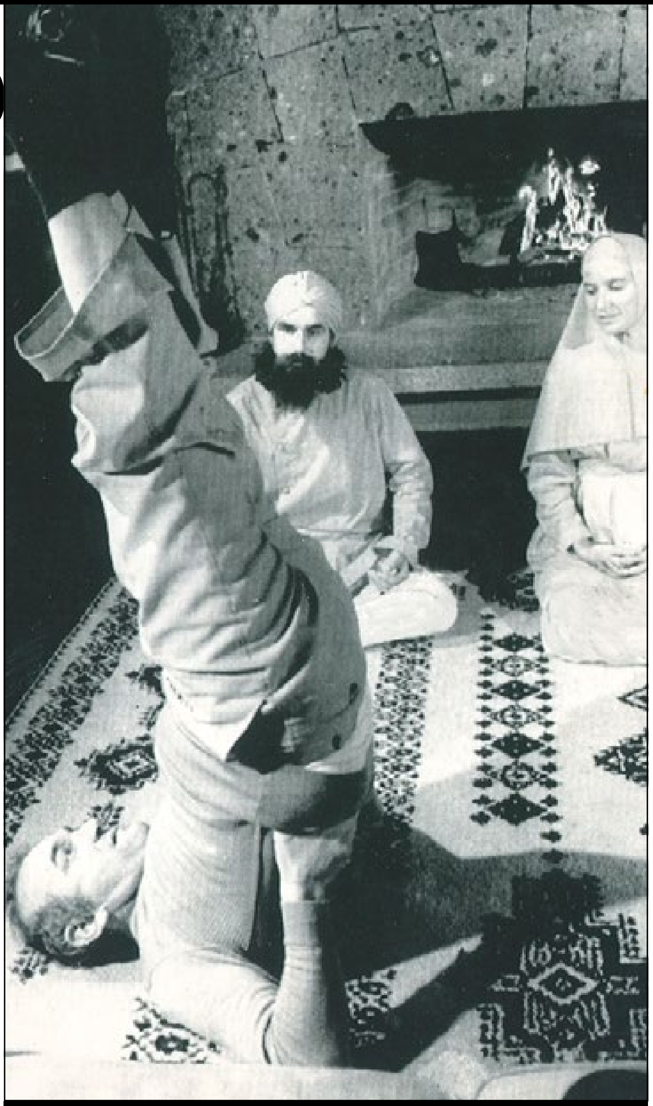


What would stop him? Shortly after an eye operation, Viktor Kortchnoi insisted on taking part in the 1992 Manila Olympiad.

The manager of Liverpool football club, Bill Shankly, once told the story of how someone reproached him that for him football was more important than life. ‘You are mistaken,’ the Scot corrected him, ‘Football is much more important than life.’ It was about Shankly that they said: ‘If that day Liverpool wasn’t playing, he would go to watch Everton. If Everton wasn’t playing he’d go to Manchester. If there was no game in Manchester, he’d go to Newcastle. If there was no football at all that day, he’d go to the park and watch children playing football. If they weren’t playing football, he’d split them into teams and organize a game.’

Chess was by far the most important thing in Kortchnoi’s life. It’s hard to say if there was something that came second. Perhaps what was in second place depended on the particular period of his life and was subject to change. But from his childhood right through to the very end, chess was indisputably in first place. If I mentioned in conversation the name of a long-forgotten mutual acquaintance, or a fact of little importance, he would titter with his characteristic little laugh: ‘My oh my, Genna, what nonsense is filling your head.’ I’m sure that in the depths of his soul he thought everything nonsense that had no direct bearing on chess.

When forced into exile, the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe said: ‘My fatherland is wherever you can see the stars.' Viktor Kortchnoi's fatherland was wherever you can play chess. His focus on chess excluded everything else. Amsterdam, Köln, Baguio, Merano, New York, London, Paris, Brussels, Beer-Sheva, Buenos Aires and a great many other cities, large and small, were in fact nothing more for him than places to lodge while he got on with his chess. Even Leningrad, the city in which he lived the first half of his life, even little Wohlen, where he lived the second half, were no more than geographical points, milestones, a background, a decoration that meant nothing whatsoever. In reality the environment in which he lived was unchanging: the chess board, thirty-two chess pieces and an opponent against whom he, Viktor Kortchnoi, carried on the eternal battle. At one time I tried to copy this fanaticism of his, and I went through a period when the game absorbed a very large part of my life. But of course it is impossible to learn such obsessiveness, just as it's not enough to study poetics to be able to write poems. There is only twelve years difference between us, and while we were still in the Soviet Union, when people saw us together, it happened they would ask him: 'Is that your son?' Viktor merely tittered and shrugged his shoulders. But it turns out that he remembered. Once, after a hard game with Geller, coming down from the stage, looking older and exhausted, he caught my eyes focused on the fairly large spot that was spreading under his armpit. 'I've experienced the kind of time pressure I was under today probably hundreds of times in my career. Hundreds of times! So why should anyone be surprised that they take you for my son!'



Baguio 1978. Kortchnoi and the gurus of the Anandra Marga movement that had to neutralize Karpov's hypnotist Dr. Zukhar.

Hypnosis and telepathy

All his life he believed in parapsychologists, mediums, magicians, yogi, and he was very susceptible to such ideas. Belief in hypnosis and telepathy ('How can you not feel what your opponent is thinking? You simply don't want to feel it') were characteristic of him back in the Soviet period and remained with him almost to the end of his life. From time to time he would take pills that would, he thought, improve his well-being, started various diets, went on health courses and slimming regimes.

In the spring of 1984 we had a two-week training session on the Bodensee. He was on some kind of special regime for his health, and each morning I went from my hotel to his sanatorium. He half-complained, half-boasted: 'If you only saw what a tiny portion they have just given me for breakfast. And before that a squeezed lemon, sea weed...'

We settled down in one of the halls

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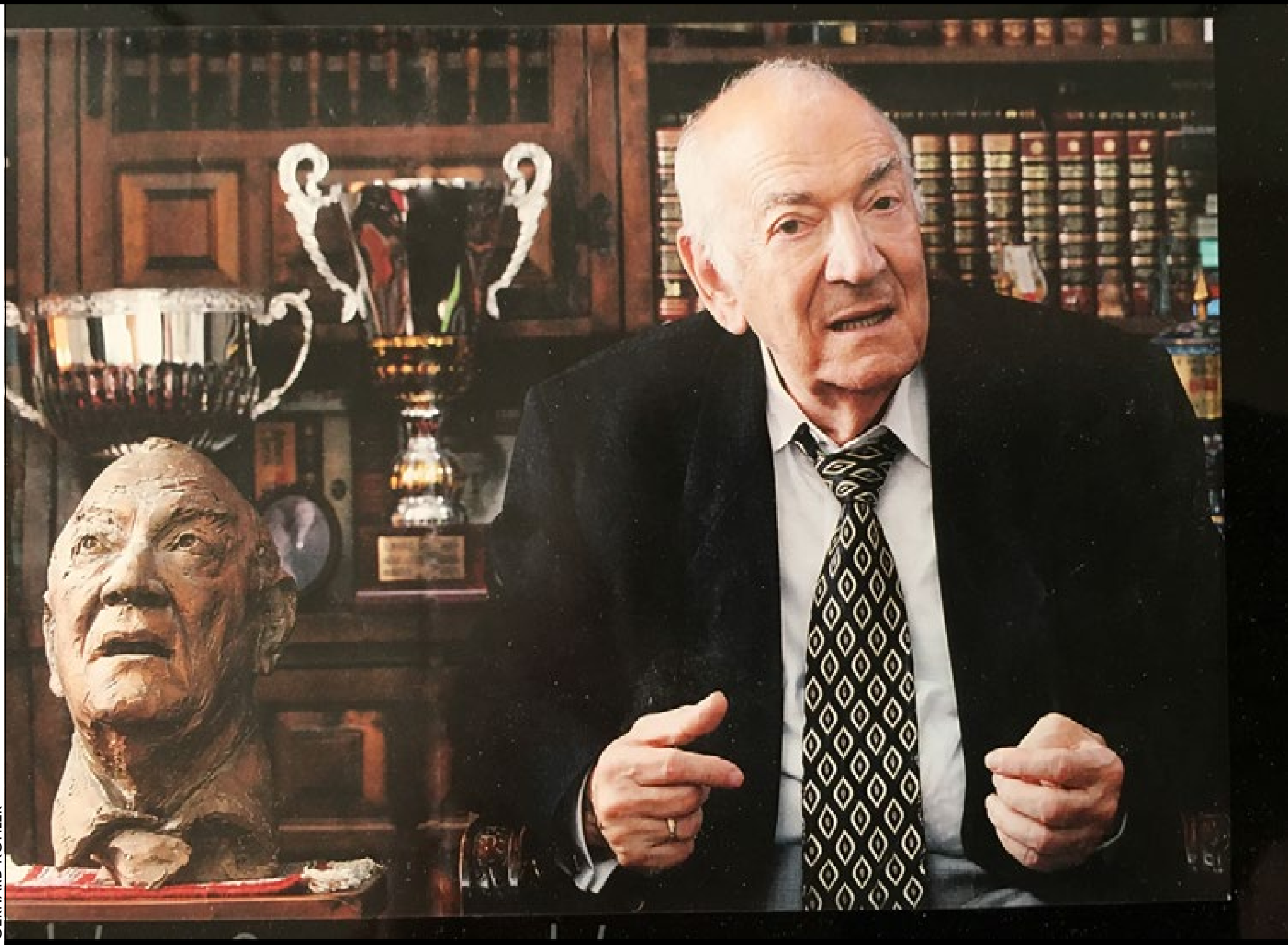
of the sanatorium, and from time to time women and men, also on health regimes, who were going to their next treatment, walked past us in white dressing gowns, glancing sideways at the two strange guys discussing matters at a chess board in a language none of them could understand.

Once I said to him that I intended to quit playing chess. He didn't even understand what I was talking about: 'I know that feeling, I sometimes refuse to take part in a tournament myself if I want to conserve my strength for some other, more important one...', and at that point directed the conversation onto more familiar ground: 'Listen, what a bungler that German is, the one who beat me in the last round at Calcutta. You see, I had the following position...'



GERHARD KÖHLER

Viktor Kortchnoi was greatly impressed by the bust that Berlin artist Bertrand Freiesleben sculpted.

A few years ago, knowing, but not willing to accept, that I already had given up playing chess a long time before, he gave me the following advice: 'Why don't you go and play in Gibraltar? They have a strong tournament, and to perform at a good level you don't have to win every game. You'll see, you'd be able to build up your rating there...'

He was absolutely incurable so far as chess was concerned. When he was in public and seemed to be taking part in a conversation he could in fact be thinking about some chess position or other, even doing analysis. I was familiar with this mental state of his. Viktor would become thoughtful, his responses would not be to the point, and his unseeing gaze would seem to look through you. Very soon you might hear him say: 'In the position we are looking at today, there is *quelque chose*...' Even when he went on skiing trips, on which I often joined him both in the Leningrad and the Swiss periods of his life, it would be in order to clear his head and prepare himself for even more intensive chess work.

Once when his wife Petra began complaining that Viktor was spending all his time playing chess, I asked her whether he read at all. 'Read?' she asked back. 'Sometimes. True, it's books about chess...'

Two years ago he was planning to take part in the Swiss blitz chess championship. Sitting in a wheelchair and speaking with difficulty, he said: 'I'm analysing a variation of the French Defence, I have some little ideas about what to do...'

As he grew older he became more withdrawn, and whenever a conversation took a turn away from chess, he would behave like a child dragged away from a sandpit. Towards the end of his life this took on ever more radical forms. He simply could not speak about anything else. But while he still had the power to speak, he would patiently answer my questions about old times, and in his assessments of chess players he would show no leniency, either with regard to age or health. Chess for him was higher than such petty things as death, and he would talk about people dead or alive as though they could walk in any moment.

'Kortchnoi merely snorted in response, before letting out through his teeth: 'I won't write history, they'll write about me!'

One day he phoned me. 'In November I'm playing again', he said, 'And you know where? In Iran! Some people here are trying to dissuade me. They say if I play in Iran I'll have problems with other countries because of the stamp they'll put in my passport. But I'm going because Iran in its own way also wants to enter dialogue with other countries. So I don't see anything bad about it!' Though he also had doubts, asking: 'So what do you think?...'

In response to the question as to whether he had made peace with Karpov, after playing with him in tournaments and even on the same team, he replied that peace was some-

NEW IN CHESS

Garry Kasparov greets Petra and Viktor Kortchnoi in the VIP-room of the 2011 London Chess Classic. The two K's always showed great respect to each other.

thing for eternity. 'But,' he said, 'you see Christianity teaches that it is not good to keep hatred in our souls for ever. We need to learn to forgive our enemies.' The tournament took place, but in an interview soon after he once again attacked his enemy with no less vitriol.

Five years ago, while he was at a tournament in Spain, Kortchnoi had a ministroke. He was in the bathroom when suddenly everything swam before his eyes and he fell. He was most upset because he was to take part in a match in St. Louis ten days later. At the age of eighty he was intent on taking the transatlantic flight and engaging in the match agreed on long before. Only the categorical ban of his doctors forced him to reconsider.

Once a young Grandmaster asked Kortchnoi his advice: what fee, in the maestro's opinion, would be the most appropriate for taking part in a tournament to which he had been invited? The Grandmaster was disappointed when Kortchnoi mentioned a very modest amount: 'I could ask that much without any advice...'

Whenever Kortchnoi took part in tournaments or gave simuls, he of course always discussed the material side of the question. But in truth money was of little interest to him. Once he remarked: 'Material security is necessary so as to have the possibility of working on chess professionally: daily and all day.'

Invectives

I watched him at the 2006 Olympiad in Turin. He was playing against Paragua from the Philippines. As he left the table, Kortchnoi opened a bottle of juice and with thirsty gulps drank half of the contents. Not taking his eyes from the position on the board, he twisted the top back on. Then he decided to drink the rest of the bottle, but he couldn't get the top off. He sank his teeth into the bottle top, for a considerable time struggling from every side. Then he realized what was the matter, and without taking his eyes off the position, rapidly twisted the bottle top off, drank the rest of the juice in a single gulp, and sat down again at the board.

As he grew older he began to be more affected by losing than he had been earlier in his life. At Turin, after a couple of days the senior judge read out a declaration at the start of the round to the effect that Kortchnoi insisted no one should hinder him by asking for autographs during play. The explanation was there for all to see: he had lost three games in a row and was completely beside himself.

Quite a few of his colleagues witnessed how he would refuse to shake hands after a game, or how he would hurl invectives at his opponent because they had not responded (or sometimes because he had not heard their response) to his proposal for a draw. Others remember angry tirades when after a game he bitterly told his opponents what he thought about their play, and sometimes what he thought about them personally.

He played the 2015 match against Uhlmann in a wheelchair. The next day he gave a simul. Signing his autograph for one of the winners, a nine-year-old child, the maestro could not resist remarking: 'Boy, your position was completely hopeless...'

On the traditional question of 'nature or nurture' (the debate about the primacy of inborn or acquired characteristics of behaviour), knowing Kortchnoi's mother as I did (not the step-mother who brought him up, but his mother by birth), I tend towards the first explanation. But of course a childhood turned upside down by war, a youth spent in harsh Stalinist times, and in general a life lived under a totalitarian regime, could not but influence the development of his personality.

In an extraordinary way, Kortchnoi combined profound chess wisdom, interesting and intelligent commentary on styles of play, and keen psychological observations with complete nonsense, and not infrequently with wholly unjustified personal attacks. His openness, so loved by journalists, often turned into off-handedness, or even rudeness. He himself was well aware of his own prickly character, and, although he did not like to talk about it, once let slip: 'I drew strength from the feeling of conflict that is very much part of my character.’

He already knew his own worth when he was still young. At the beginning of the 1950s, when asked what he was doing, the young Master replied that he was studying history at university. ‘That’s wonderful!’ cried his interlocutor, ‘you will write a history of chess!’ Kortchnoi merely snorted in response, before letting out through his teeth: ‘I won’t write history, they’ll write about me!’

Today, looking back as I write these lines, I see that fate blessed me with a close relationship not only with a great chess player, but also with one of the most extraordinary people in the history of our game, with a man for whom life and chess were synonyms.

He was not at all religious, at the very most he was an agnostic, but he was concerned about his reputation after death. In the last years of his life he talked to me as Goethe did with Eckermann. He presented me with a collection of his selected games, *My Best Games*, signing the book: ‘To Nestor the Chronicler, from one of the people closest to him worthy of an obituary, wishing you to “Keep on as you are”. 23 March 2011.’

Once he said: ‘It’s a long time now since I commented on my game with Bagirov, and I’ve just remembered that he died while he was playing a game. And he had a winning position when he died. It seems Gipslis also died while he was playing, and Suetin probably did too... That’s a wonderful way to die, during a game of chess!’

When very recently someone had suggested to him that he would probably like to die that way, at the chess board, he said: ‘Only I must finish the game and give a checkmate!’

He said: ‘When I see how Taimanov plays nowadays, I cannot imagine my chess strength would decline so much. I think I can maintain my play at a higher level.’

Fate decreed otherwise. As age took its toll, especially after another stroke in October 2012, he found himself in a wheelchair, his speech impaired, and his hearing even worse than it already was.

Stiff-necked

In recent years, every February Kortchnoi had been taken to Zurich to watch the tournaments of Oleg Skvortsov. He followed the games on the electronic board and became completely absorbed in the world so familiar to him. Almost deaf, unable to control the volume of his voice and reacting aloud to the moves, the whole hall heard his sighs and exclamations. Obviously being once again close to the world of chess made him happy, although at the same time in truth he wanted only one thing: to play chess himself. When his son presented him with an iPad and showed him how to use it, he remained indifferent and showed no interest in chess websites. He was not attracted to the way online games worked. He said: ‘It’s not real. In chess you have to hold the pieces in your hand, to feel them...’

At the very end of his life he spoke several times of euthanasia. When his wife suggested forgetting such thoughts, he said: ‘It’s fine for you, Petra. You sit and do your crosswords. But what can I do? I can’t play chess!’

The Biblical word ‘stiff-necked’ – meaning disobedient, self-willed – best of all characterizes Viktor Kortchnoi. At the root of this word is the image of an animal refusing to bend its neck, preventing anyone putting it in harness. Even at the very end, in hospital, when he was told to drink some kind of solution, a contrast agent for an X-ray, he obstinately compressed his lips, repeating just one word – ‘Home!’ The doctors gave in and two days later on 6 June he died in Wohlen, in his own bed. He fell asleep and did not wake up again.

Several dozen people attended his funeral, mostly Swiss and German chess players, people from his chess club, his sparring partners of recent years. The service was held (in German); the music was by Mozart. And Philidor.

Initially the intention had been to place chess pieces in his coffin, but then it was decided not to do this. But a chess board of fresh flowers stood next to the coffin of a man for whom chess had been more important than life itself. ■

DEUTSCHLAND
Wolfgang Uhlmann
Großmeister, Ex-WM-Kandidat
SCHWEIZ
Viktor Kortschnoi
Ex-Vizeweltmeister
MEYRA

NEW IN CHESS

In February 2015 Viktor Kortchnoi won a rapid match against Wolfgang Uhlmann in Zurich. As long as he followed his intuition Kortchnoi still played amazingly strong. The mistakes came when he paused to think.

Judit Polgar

Teamwork

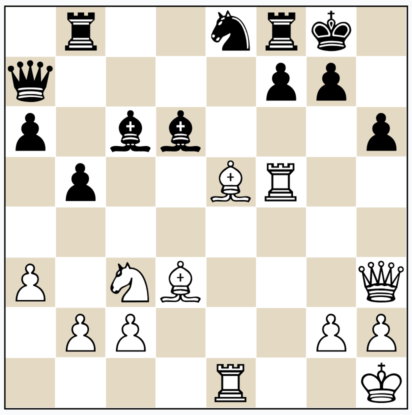
You cannot do it alone. Just like the chess pieces operate best in unison, **JUDIT POLGAR** realized already at an early age that the close bond with her sisters was the basis of her and their successes.

In my previous articles I have examined some of the best ways to use each piece individually, starting with His Majesty the king and ending with the modest soldier, the pawn. But in a chess game the maximum effect of the pieces is achieved if they all act in harmony, as the members of a symphonic orchestra, coordinated by the conductor's baton or as a football team following the trainer's advice and specially designed schemes.

I would draw a parallel between this image and the way I and my sisters achieved our ascension on the chess firmament. If we hadn't acted as a real team, we might well have stumbled over the difficulties of a professional chess life. But by sticking together and offering each other support and care, we managed to achieve unprecedented results.

The same could be said of our most spectacular wins, which in the early period of our career provoked such an impact in the media. Our unexpected combinations would not have been successful if our pieces had not been placed on the best squares. Only the full harmony of the army at the critical moment allows carrying out decisive operations based on sacrifices.

I will start with one of my favourite games, which was played in one of my most memorable tournaments, the one in which I obtained my first GM norm.



Judit Polgar-Hulak
Amsterdam 1989
position after 21...♗d6

White has an active position, but with his last move, 22...♗d6?, my experienced opponent had hoped to exchange one of my key attacking pieces, the e5-bishop. Had he succeeded, he could have launched his queenside counterplay based on ...a6-a5 and ...b5-b4, with unclear play. But the dynamism of my coordinated pieces allowed me to deliver a stunning blow:

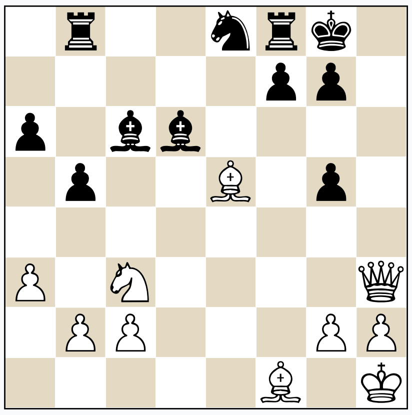
22.♖g5!

A short rook move threatening 23.♕xh6.

22...♕f2 A desperate defence. Black had no time for 22...♗xe5 due to 23.♕xh6 g6 24.♖exe5, with the decisive threat of ♖h5, for instance 24...♘g7 25.♖h5 ♘xh5 26.♖xh5 and White wins.

23.♖f1 ♕xf1+ Getting two rooks for the queen and distracting my bishop from its attacking diagonal. If 23...♕d2 then 24.♕f5, with a winning attack.

24.♗xf1 hxg5



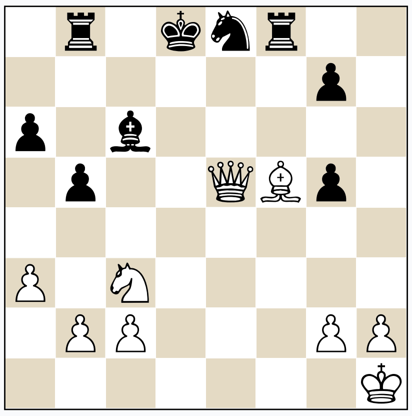
25.♗d3! Restoring the attacking mechanism. Note that Black had no time to take the annoying e5-bishop, which makes ...g7-g6 impossible in view of ♕h8 mate.

25...f5 26.♗xf5 ♗xe5 Black's material advantage is temporary, since the e5-bishop is hanging.

27.♕h7+ ♔f7 28.♕g6+ ♔e7

On 28...♔g8, 29.♗e6+ would mate soon.

29.♕e6+ ♔d8 30.♕xe5



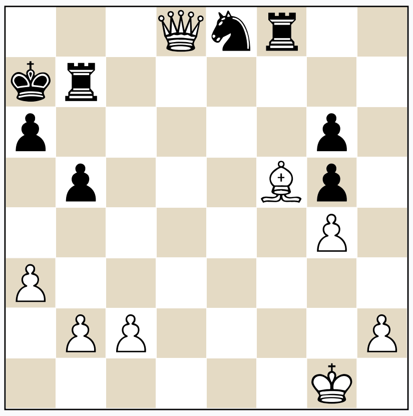
I had this position in mind when playing 22.♖g5!. The black king is exposed and the queen is much stronger than the uncoordinated rooks.

30...♖b7 31.♔g1! ♖bf7 32.g4 g6 Vainly hoping for 33.♗xg6?? ♖f1, mate. It is curious that my bishop will partly share the fate of its colleague, remaining under attack for a whole sequence.

So far, all my pieces have played their parts perfectly, but you may wonder what the reserve knight might be doing. The answer will come soon.

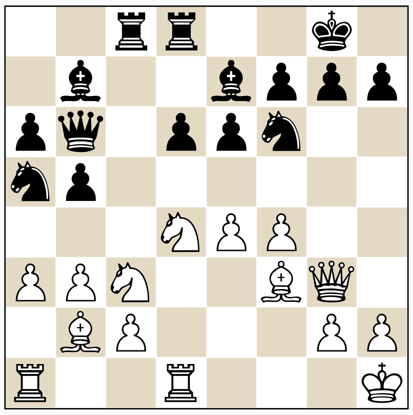
33.♕b8+ ♔e7 34.♘d5+! Forcing

Black to weaken the light squares around the king. **34...♗xd5 35.♕e5+ ♔d8 36.♕xd5+ ♔c7** 36...♔e7 would lose an exchange after 37.♕d7+ ♔f6 38.♕e6+ ♔g7 39.♕xg6+ ♔h8 40.♕h6+ ♔g8 41.♗e6+–. **37.♕c5+ ♔b8 38.♕b6+ ♖b7 39.♕d8+ ♔a7** The king has reached a relatively safe area, but his pieces have become vulnerable.



40.♗xg6 Having lost its initial target, the king, the bishop contents itself with collecting the knight. 1-0.

That same year, Sofia played the tournament of her life in Rome. She defeated one grandmaster after another, achieving the fantastic result of 8½/9. Here is her combination against a leading Soviet player of that time.



Sofia Polgar-Chernin
Rome 1989
position after 18...♖fd8

When playing 18...♖fd8, Chernin must have thought that the b2-bishop's pressure is not too dangerous, as there are three knights standing in its way. But he had underestimated the teamwork of Sofia's queen and minor pieces...

19.♘d5!

Starting to clear the long diagonal.

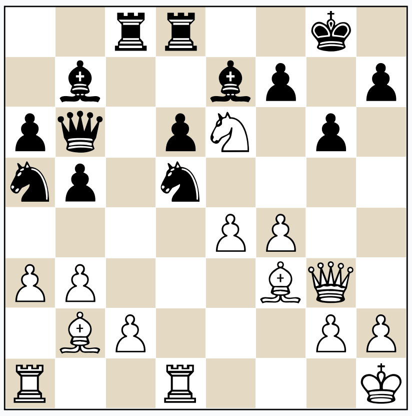
19...♘xd5 There is no way to stop the attack already.

19...exd5 allows 20.♘f5 ♗f8 21.♘xg7 ♗xg7 22.♗xf6+–.

And if 19...♗xd5 20.exd5+-, Black could not keep preventing ♘f5 for too long.

> 'You may wonder what the reserve knight might be doing. The answer will come soon.'

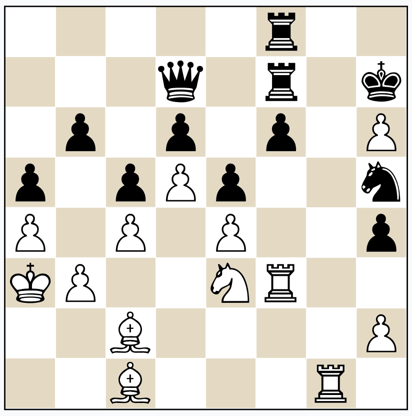
20.♘xe6! The second blow, threatening mate on g7. **20...g6**



21.♘xd8 Switching to the technical phase. White could have cleared matters quickly with 21.exd5! fxe6 22.♗g4 ♖xc2 23.♗xe6+ ♔f8 24.♗d4 ♕c7 25.♕h3 h5 26.♕g3, winning.

21...♕xd8 22.exd5 White is an exchange up and won on move 35.

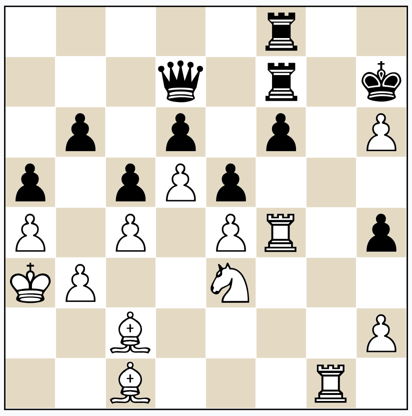
Susan's playing style differed from mine and Sofia's by its marked positional tendency. But she never shied away from combinative play when everything was ready for it. Quite typically, in the next example the position has a blocked character, but, more important for our theme, we will notice that perfect teamwork can prevail over a significant material advantage.



Susan Polgar-Kotronias
Corfu 1990
position after 48...♘h5

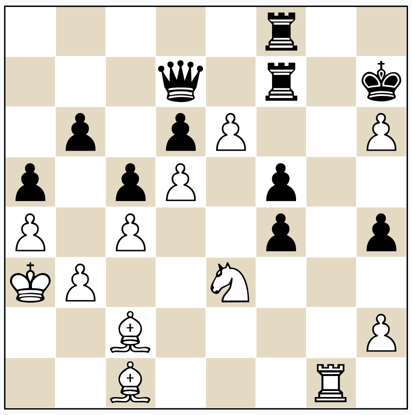
Right after the opening, Susan had exchanged her queen for three minor pieces, reaching a one-sided position with no counterplay for Black. In the subsequent manoeuvring phase, she patiently transferred her king to the queenside and then found a favourable moment to open the kingside by sacrificing a piece.

49.♖f5 ♘f4 50.♖xf4!



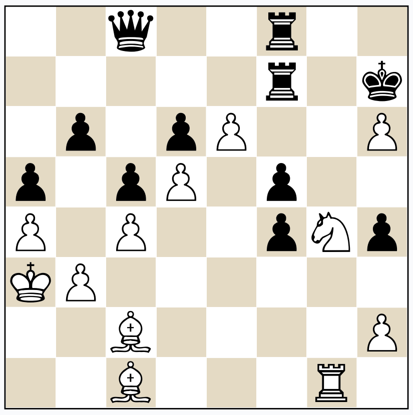
Clearing the way for the c2-bishop.

50...exf4 51.e5+ f5 52.e6

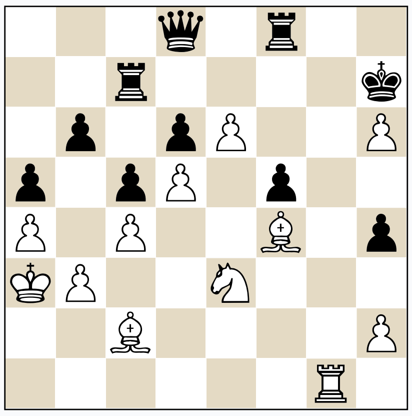


52...♕e7?! Black is indirectly targeting the e3-square, but the last move leaves the f7-rook trapped. 52...♕d8? would lose quickly to 53.exf7 fxe3 54.♗xf5+ ♔xh6 55.♗xe3+ ♔h5 56.♗g6 mate.

Without changing the evaluation essentially, the critical line is 52...♕c8, freeing the rook and keeping an X-ray eye on the f5-pawn. 53.exf7 fxe3 won't work out well for White already, but after the quiet and easily overlooked move 53.♘g4! the vulnerability of the king and the perfect coordination of White's pieces leave Black in a helpless position despite his huge material advantage (queen and rook versus three minor pieces): 53...♖c7 54.♗xf4 ♕d8 55.♘e3.



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

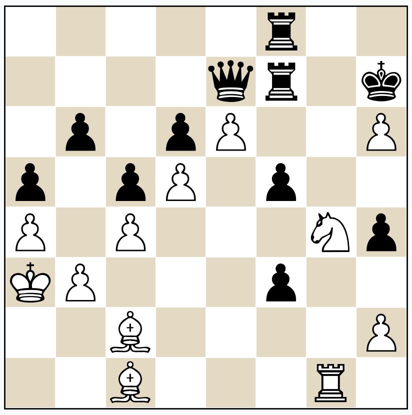


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

White is threatening 56.♘xf5 ♖xf5 57.♗xf5+ ♔h8 58.♗c1!!. A decisive retreat. Preparing ♗b2+. 55...♖g8 does not bring any relief after the calm 56.♖f1.

53.♘g4! A familiar move. Black's idea was based on 53.exf7 fxe3 54.♗xf5+ ♔xh6, when the e3-pawn is defended.

53...f3 Sticking to the material advantage with 53...♖f6 does not help: 54.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 55.♗b2. The queen does not have good squares; for instance: 55...♕xh6 (55...♕d8 56.♖g7+ ♔xh6 57.e7 is similar) 56.e7. The rook is lost, since 56...♖e8 leads to disaster after 57.♗xf5+.



After the last move Susan should have simply played 54.exf7 ♖xf7 55.♗d3, with a devastating attack with more or less equal material. By wishing to improve on this line, she went:

54.♗b2? providing the black queen with an excellent square: **54...♕g5**

Suddenly there is no time for 55.exf7? due to 55...f2!, but Susan managed to swindle her opponent a few moves later. As they say, Caissa smiles on the brave... 1-0. ■

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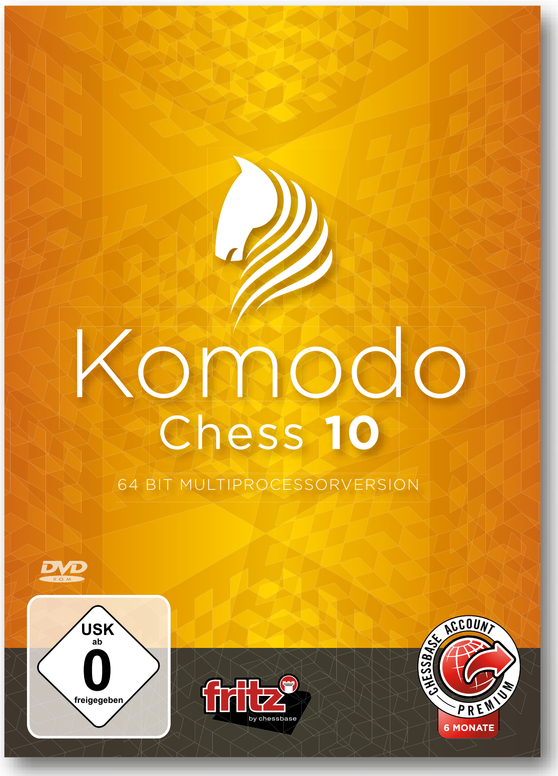
ChessBase

Komodo Chess 10



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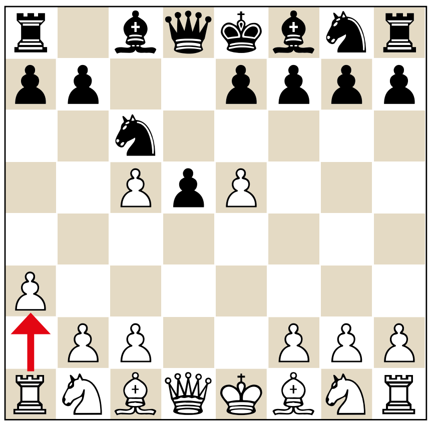
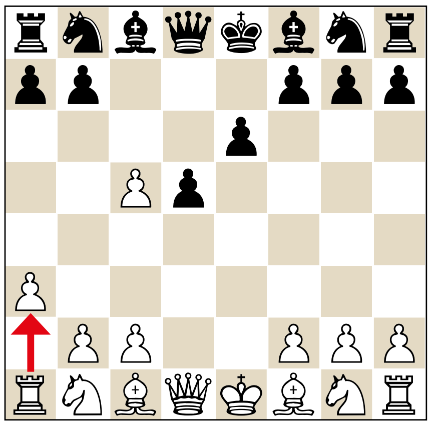
SECRETS OF OPENING SURPRISES

SOS: Caro-Kann Advance: 5.a3!

JEROEN BOSCH





In a popular line of the Caro-Kann Advance we will investigate an early rook-pawn move (5.a3!) to avoid some long theoretical lines, to play for an advantage and to surprise our opponent (of course!). As an extra bonus we will see that 5.a3 can be played against both black lines (4...♘c6 and 4...e6) – sometimes you have all the luck!

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5

More common is 3...♗f5, but 3...c5 has a respectable pedigree. In their 1961 World Championship match, Botvinnik played the delayed pawn advance three times against Tal. Indeed, Black loses a tempo with 3...c5, but he argues that in the resulting French Advance position he will have the added benefit of being able to develop the light-squared bishop outside his pawn chain (obviously not an option in the French). In recent times, Igor Khenkin and Keith Arkell have been the most consistent supporters of 3...c5. However, there are numerous grandmasters who have adopted 3...c5, e.g. Najer, Andreikin and Fridman. In one of the most recent repertoire books on the Caro-Kann (*The Caro-Kann*, Everyman 2015), Jovanka Houska prefers exactly this line for Black to combat 3.e5.

4.dxc5

White feels that he should exploit the extra tempo, not wishing to allow something like 4.c3 ♘c6 5.♘f3 ♗g4, when Black has a fairly comfortable version of the Short Variation (3...♗f5 4.♘f3), or of the French Advance, for that matter.

Now there are two options for Black: 4...♘c6 and 4...e6. We will go for 5.a3! in both cases.

Variation I

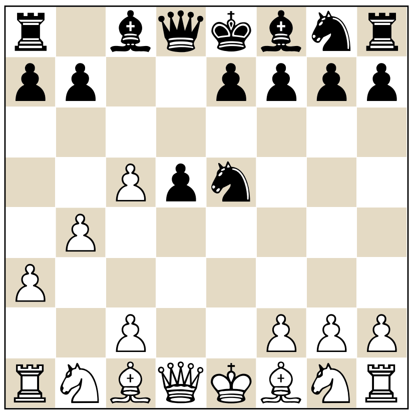
4...♘c6 5.a3!?

A modest-looking move, preparing b2-b4 to defend the c5-pawn and to create a majority on the queenside. The dark-squared bishop will in all likelihood be placed on the long diagonal.

5...♘xe5

When White offers a central pawn 'for free', who is Black to refuse? This is, of course, the critical reply. The alternative is 5...e6, when 6.b4 a5! 7.b5 ♘xe5 favours Black, which is why White continues with 6.♘f3 instead, transposing to Variation II after 6...♗xc5 7.b4 ♗b6 8.♗b2.

6.b4



Black now has to think prophylactically. How is he going to meet 7.♗b2,

5.a3!?

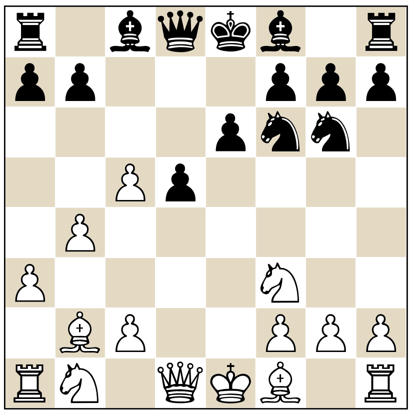
'Preparing b2-b4 to defend the c5-pawn and to create a majority on the queenside.'

NEW IN CHESS TRAINING

followed by the free development of White's pieces (♘f3, ♘d2, ♗b5 or ♗d3, 0-0 and c4)? In our main line Black comes up with the clever fianchetto of his kingside bishop, aiming to neutralize the b2-bishop. In the notes we will see what happens when Black disregards the long diagonal.

6...g6

■ Naive play lands Black into trouble: 6...e6 7.♗b2 ♘g6 8.♘f3 ♘f6, and now:



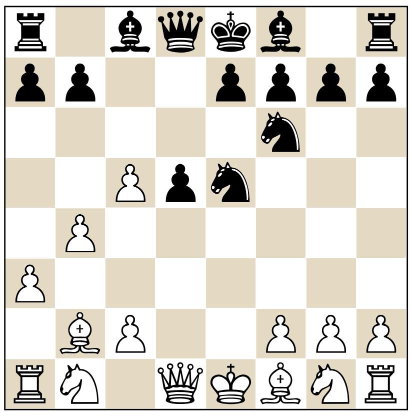
– 9.♗d3 is not the most accurate option, but the next game illustrates where the chances of both sides lie: 9...♗e7 (9...♗d7!, followed by ...b6, gives counterplay) 10.0-0 0-0 11.♘bd2 ♕c7?! (correct is 11...♗d7 12.c4 b6) 12.c4 dxc4 13.♘xc4 ♖d8 14.♕c2. Basically, this is the set-up that White is aiming for. Black again had to seek counterplay now with 14...b6. 14...♗d7?! 15.♗xg6! hxg6 16.♗e5 ♕c8 17.♗d6, with a comfortable edge in Nakar-Buran, Pardubice 2015.

– Stronger is the immediate 9.c4, which promises a slight edge: 9...♗e7 10.cxd5 exd5 (10...♘xd5 11.♗xg7) 11.♗b5+ ♗d7 12.♘c3 0-0 13.♗xd7 ♕xd7 14.0-0, Sitnikov-Dumansky, Evpatoria 2007.

– Quite interesting is the suggestion of the engines to further harass Black's queen's knight with 9.h4!?: after 9...h5 10.♗d3 ♘f4 11.♗b5+ ♗d7 12.♗xd7+ ♘xd7 13.g3 White is better.

■ With 6...a6 Black prepares a retreat of the knight to c6: 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.♘f3 (8.♘c3!? ♘f6 9.♘a4!? is a way to exploit the weakening of the b6-square) 8...♗g4 9.♗e2 (the immediate 9.c4!? certainly deserves attention) 9...♘f6 10.h3 ♗h5 11.0-0 e6 12.♘bd2, with a slight edge for White in Muminova-Khotenashvili, Khanty-Mansiysk 2014.

■ 6...♘f6 7.♗b2



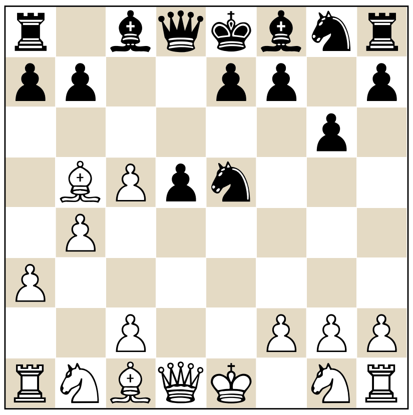
Now where should the steed move to? Or should it move at all? Regardless of how Black answers these questions, his position continues to feel inferior:

– 7...♘c6 8.♗b5, Bodnaruk-Girya, Plovdiv 2014, is perhaps best met by 8...a5!? 9.♘f3 ♗d7, which is why White may prefer 8.♘f3 e6 9.c4 a5!? 10.cxd5 (or 10.b5!? ♘b8 11.♗d4) 10...♕xd5. Now White gets a dangerous initiative for two pawns after 11.♘bd2 axb4 12.axb4 ♖xa1 13.♕xa1 ♘xb4 14.♗b5+ ♗d7 15.♕a8+ ♔e7 16.♗c4 ♕xc5 17.0-0. Instead, the game V.Novikov-Arkell, Vilnius 2014, saw 11.♘c3?!, when 11...♕xd1+ 12.♖xd1 axb4 13.♘b5 could have been profitably met by 13...♖a5!.

– 7...♕c7 has been played a couple of times, but it looks like an inferior option: 8.♘c3 (or 8.♘f3 ♘xf3+ 9.♕xf3 ♗g4?! 10.♗b5+ ♗d7 11.♗xd7+ ♕xd7 12.0-0±, Zambor-Danada, Stara Lubovna 2015) 8...e6 9.♘f3 ♘xf3+ (9...♘c6 10.♗e2 – 10.♘b5! ♕d8 11.c4 - 10...♗e7 11.0-0 0-0 12.♘b5 ♕d8 13.c4±, Bulmaga-Isgandarova, Mamaia 2016) 10.♕xf3 ♗e7 11.♘b5! ♕d8 12.♗d3 0-0 13.♕g3!? ♘h5 14.♕f3 ♘f6 15.0-0 ♗d7, and now either 16.c4 Sedlak-Bodiroga, Zupanja 2008, or 16.♘d6!?.

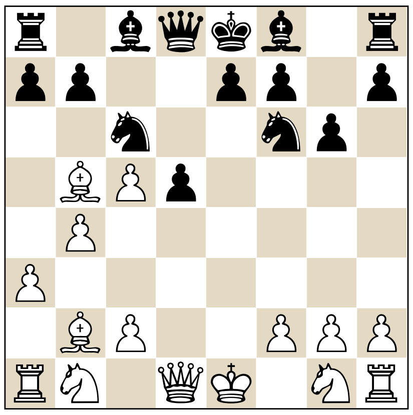
– 7...♘g6 8.♗b5+?! (better is 8.♘f3, which should transpose to one of our lines above) 8...♗d7 9.♗xd7+ ♕xd7 10.♘f3 ♕e6+ (10...b6! is fine for Black) 11.♕e2 ♕xe2+ 12.♔xe2 ♘f4+?! 13.♔f1 e6 14.♘c3 ♖c8 15.g3 ♘g6 16.h4 h6 17.h5 ♘e7 18.♘b5±, Kosteniuk-Khotenashvili, Huaian 2016.

7.♗b5+ Starting a forcing tactical sequence. One point of Black's set-up is that after 7.♗b2 ♗g7 the bishop on b2 will be unprotected, so White will have to spend time because of the threatened discovered check.



7...♗d7 Black sacrifices a pawn to obtain the bishop pair.

After 7...♘c6 8.♗b2 ♘f6



White has a few options:

– 9.♗xf6!? is an ambitious attempt that seems to fall short of achieving an edge: 9...exf6 10.♘c3 ♗e6 11.♘ge2 ♗h6 (11...♗g7) 12.♘d4 ♖c8 13.♕f3 0-0 14.♗xc6 bxc6 15.0-0 ♖e8, and the bishops and Black's solid central control provide adequate compensation for White's superior pawn structure; Zherebukh-Burg, Haarlem 2012.

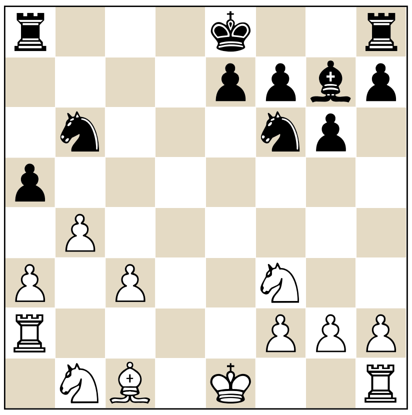
– 9.c4 is the normal continuation, which promises an edge: 9...♗e6 10.♘f3 ♗g7 (10...dxc4 11.♘bd2 ♗g7 12.0-0 0-0 13.♗xc4 ♗xc4 14.♘xc4, and with simple play White will get his usual edge due to the majority on the queenside and his space advantage there, Haug-Machlik, Fagernes 2016) 11.♘g5 (11.0-0 0-0 12.♘bd2) 11...♕d7 12.0-0 0-0 13.♘xe6 ♕xe6, and now, rather than 14.cxd5 ♘xd5, with equality, Darini-Kovalenko, Baku 2014, White should maintain the tension with 14.♘d2.

8.♕xd5

White accepts the bait. Alternatively, he can settle for 8.♕e2 ♗g7 9.♗b2 ♗xb5 10.♕xb5+ ♕d7 11.♕xd7+ ♔xd7 12.♔e2 (again a discovered check on d3 or f3 was threatened) 12...♗f6 13.♘d2, and the endgame was approximately equal in Najer-Landa, Germany 2012.

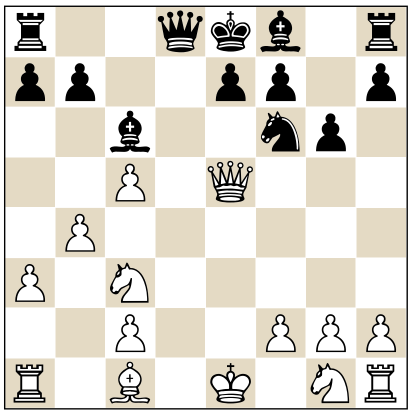
8...♗xb5

Less appealing is 8...♗g7 9.♗xd7+ ♕xd7 10.♕xd7+ ♘xd7 11.c3 (11.♖a2 a5 12.c3 leads to the same thing) 11...a5 12.♖a2 b6 (Black is looking for counterplay – 12...♘e5 13.♔e2) 13.cxb6 ♘xb6 14.♘f3 ♘f6.



White is a pawn up, but Black has an edge in development and some pressure against White's queenside. However, even though White has to play accurately, he does hold the better chances, making this line look like an unattractive struggle for a draw for Black. 15.0-0 (15.♗e3 ♘fd5 16.♗xb6! ♘xb6 17.♔e2; Perunovic-Torma, Hungary 2015) 15...0-0 16.♗e3 ♘fd5 17.♗xb6 ♘xb6 18.♘fd2 ♖fc8 19.♘b3 axb4 (19...♘c4) 20.cxb4 ♘d5 21.♖d2 e6 22.g3±; Kryvoruchko-Ankit, Abu Dhabi 2014.

9.♕xe5 ♘f6 10.♘c3 ♗c6



At the end of a more or less forcing sequence, White has won a pawn, but Black has a powerful light-squared bishop. The engines still have a slight preference for White at this stage. In my opinion, Black has (nearly) enough compensation for the pawn. Let's see how things developed in grandmaster practice.

11.♘f3

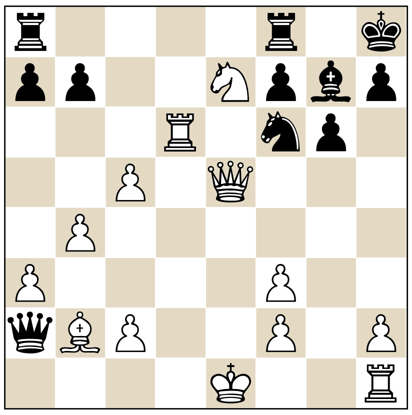
Developing the knight to its natural square is the best option.

– 11.f3?! ♗g7 12.♘ge2 0-0 13.♗b2 (13.♕g5), and now best was 13...♘e4 14.♕f4 e5 15.♕e3 ♕h4+ 16.g3 ♕g5, when Black has the better chances, but 13...b6 wasn't so bad either, and Black had full compensation for the pawn in Tukhaev-Motylev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015.

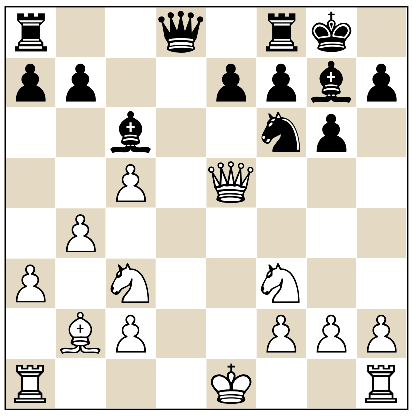
– 11.♘ge2 ♗g7 12.0-0 0-0 13.♗b2 ♘e4 14.♕f4, and now White would be better but for 14...♕d2! 15.♕xd2, and a draw was agreed in Predojevic-Asrian, Moscow 2008. And indeed, Black has at least full compensation following 15...♘xd2 16.♖fe1 ♘c4 17.♗c1 ♖fd8.

11...♗g7 12.♗b2 0-0

Not 12...♗xf3?! 13.gxf3 0-0 14.♖d1, with an edge. The problem is that 14...♕c8?! doesn't work in view of 15.♘d5! ♔h8 16.♘xe7 ♕e6 17.♖d6 ♕a2



18.♖xf6! (18.♕xf6 ♕xb2 19.♕xb2 ♗xb2±) 18...♕b1+ 19.♔e2 ♕xh1 20.♖xg6!, with some pretty mating motifs. An important line is the forcing 20...♗xe5 21.♗xe5+ f6 22.♖xf6 ♔g7 (22...♖xf6?? 23.♗xf6 mate) 23.♘f5+ ♔g8 24.♘h6+ ♔g7 25.♖e6+ ♖f6 26.♖xf6 ♖e8 27.♖e6+ ♔f8 28.♗d6+ ♔g7 29.♖xe8 ♔xh6, and White is well ahead in material and should win after 30.♖a8.



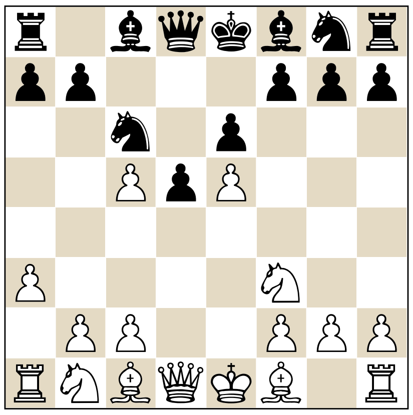
13.♕e2 13.♖d1! is White's best bet, yielding him chances of an advantage. **13...b6** 13...♘h5 would yield Black sufficient compensation for the pawn after 14.0-0 ♕d7 15.♕e3 (15.♖fd1? ♘f4–+) 15...♕f5. **14.cxb6** Chances are even after 14.0-0 bxc5 15.♘e5. **14...♕xb6** Decent compensation is also guaranteed after 14...axb6. **15.0-0 a5?** Again, 15...♘h5 was an option. **16.♘e5** Or 16.b5. **16...♗b7 17.♘a4 ♕c7 18.♘c5** Now White is a sound pawn up, which he eventually converted in Fedorov-Motylev, Minsk 2015.

Variation II

4...e6 5.a3 ♘c6

Many roads lead to Rome (i.e. the same position) in this line. 5...♗xc5 6.♘f3 ♘e7 7.♗d3 ♘g6 8.0-0 ♘c6 9.b4 is another transposition.

6.♘f3 This can also arise via 4...♘c6 5.a3 e6 6.♘f3, as mentioned above.



6...♗xc5

Not entirely stupid is 6...f6, with the following two options:

– 7.exf6 ♕xf6 (7...♘xf6 8.b4) 8.♘c3 ♗xc5 9.♘b5 ♕e7 10.♗f4 e5 11.♗g5 ♘f6 12.♗xf6 gxf6 13.♕xd5 is sharp but perhaps slightly better for White.

NEW IN CHESS TRAINING

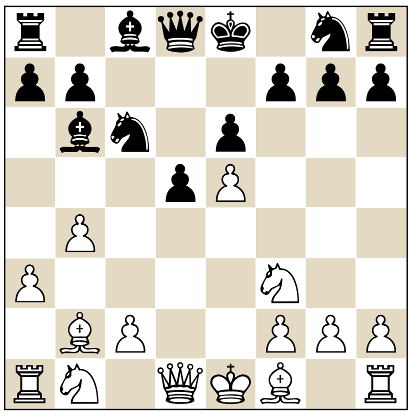
– 7.b4!? fxe5 (perhaps the unclear 7...a5!? 8.b5 ♘xe5 9.♘xe5 fxe5 10.♕h5+ g6 11.♕xe5 ♘f6) 8.♗b5 ♕c7 9.♗b2 (9.c4!? looks pretty OK) 9...e4 10.♘e5 ♘f6 11.f3 exf3 (stronger is Houska's 11...♗e7 12.0-0 0-0, which is equal) 12.♘xf3 ♗e7 13.♗e5 ♕d8 14.♘d4 ♗d7 15.♗xc6 bxc6 16.0-0 0-0 17.♘d2±, Chandra-Ostrovskiy, Philadelphia 2016.

7.b4 ♗b6

No good is 7...♗e7 8.b5 ♘a5 9.♗d3 ♗d7 10.0-0, with a favourable French Advance (how to develop Black's king's knight?), Sveshnikov-Petrov, Nova Gorica 1999.

8.♗b2

8.♗d3 ♘ge7 9.0-0 ♘g6 10.♗b2! transposes to our main line.



8...♘ge7

After the sharp 8...f6!? 9.♗b5 ♘e7 10.exf6 gxf6 11.c4 0-0 12.0-0 a6 13.♗a4 dxc4 14.♕c1 (not 14.♘bd2?! ♗c7!, Swiercz-Nabaty, Jerusalem 2015) 14...♗d7 15.♕xc4 Black's position is more difficult to play – Mullon-Nikolaidis, Gibraltar 2011.

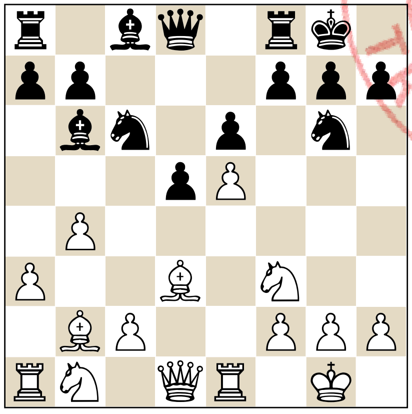
Black cannot solve his problems with 8...♘h6 9.♗d3 ♗d7 (9...♘f5 10.0-0 0-0 11.♘bd2 ♗d7 12.c4±, Nedev-Miladinovic, Novi Sad 2012) 10.0-0 0-0 11.♘bd2 a5 12.b5 ♘e7 13.a4 ♘g6 14.g3, with a pleasant edge for White in S.Zhigalko-Agrest, Jurmala 2013.

9.♗d3 ♘g6 10.0-0 0-0

Both sides are playing natural moves. Instead 10...♘f4?! 11.c4! ♘xd3 12.♕xd3 dxc4 13.♕xc4 0-0 14.♘c3 is rightly indicated as better for White by Houska.

11.♖e1!

Best by test! White can now withdraw the bishop in case of a future ...♘f4.



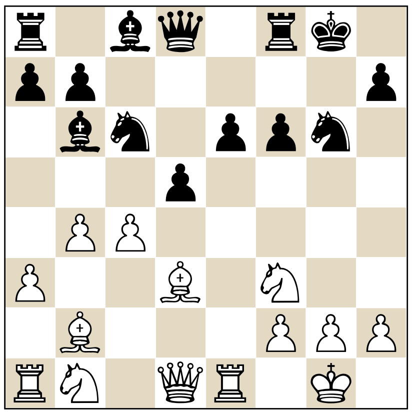
11...f6!

Black seeks counterplay at the cost of loosening his structure.

A high-level game saw 11...a5?! 12.b5 ♘ce7 (12...♘b8 is no good due to the characteristic 13.c4!) 13.a4 (White has other options in the form of 13.g3!? and 13.c4 ♘f4 14.♘c3!?) 13...♗c5?! (White is also better after 13...f6 14.exf6 gxf6 15.c4) 14.♘bd2 ♕b6 15.♖f1 ♕c7 16.♘b3 b6 17.♖e1 and White had an excellent position in Nepomniachtchi-Andreikin, Nizhny Novgorod 2013.

Or 11...♗d7 12.♘bd2 ♘f4 13.♗f1 ♘e7 14.g3 ♘fg6, Swiercz-Khenkin, Warsaw 2013, and now strongest was 15.c4 dxc4 16.♘xc4 ♗c6 17.♘g5 with a pleasant edge.

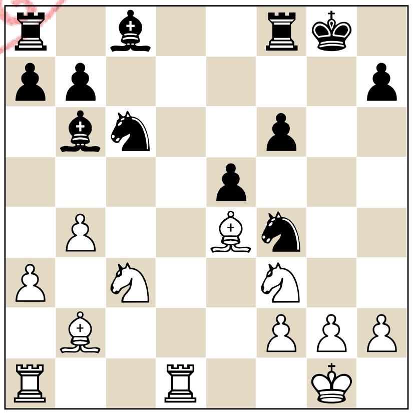
12.exf6 gxf6 13.c4



13...♘f4 Black is worse after 13...dxc4 14.♗xc4 ♕xd1 15.♖xd1 ♔f7?! 16.♘c3 Gabriel-Lauber, Bad Wörishofen 1997, while Houska's 15...♘ge5 isn't that appealing either. Black suffers after both 16.♘bd2 ♘xc4 17.♘xc4 e5 18.♘xb6 axb6 19.♘d2, and 16.♘xe5 fxe5 17.♖d2.

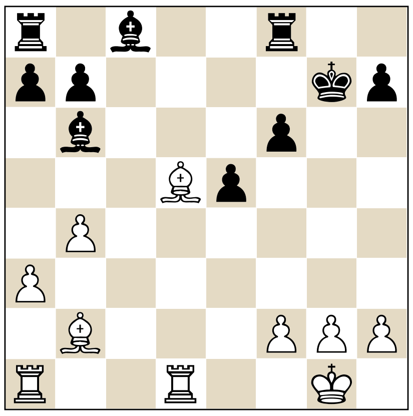
14.cxd5 The much more common 14.♗f1 doesn't seem to achieve much after either 14...e5 or 14...dxc4 15.♗xc4 ♕xd1 16.♖xd1 ♔g7 (Ducarmon-Villegas, Barcelona 2015).

14...♕xd5 15.♗e4 ♕xd1 16.♖xd1 e5 17.♘c3



In this queenless middlegame, Black still hasn't equalized. First we should note that after the natural 17...♗e6 (as in Mingarro Carceller-Cruz Lledo, Lorca 2015), White should attack the active knight with 18.♗c1, with a slight edge.

Better is Houska's line 17...♘d4 18.♘d5 ♘xf3+ 19.♗xf3 ♘xd5 20.♗xd5+ ♔g7



and now I would prefer 21.h3! to 21.♗e4 ♖f7, which is how Houska's analysis continues.

Material is equal, and the knights and queens have come off, yet White preserves some slight edge. He is ahead in development, whereas Black's queenside is under pressure.

Conclusion

5.a3 is an excellent weapon to counter both 4...♘c6 and 4...e6. In the first line, Black has to sacrifice a pawn to keep some dynamic chances for equality. The second line strikes me as unattractive for a Caro-Kann player, since the play is much closer to the French Defence, and White seems to preserve a slight but nagging edge. ■

And then came Shakh...

While Fabiano Caruana and Anish Giri set an inexorable pace in their ambition to win the Gashimov Memorial, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov seemed to be languishing in the wings. But the last act was his. The Azeri number one won his last three games, defeating both Caruana and Giri, and then also got the better of the American in the blitz tiebreaker. ERWIN L'AMI reports from Shamkir.

Over the years, I have played in many memorial tournaments, most of them honouring great players from a distant past. In the Dutch city of Leiden I regularly took part in the annual memorial tournament for Daniel Noteboom (1910-1932), a great promise with a very short career who is also remembered by the Noteboom Variation in the Semi-Slav. And six months ago my wife and I flew to Merida, where we played in the Carlos Torre memorial, a tribute to the Mexican legend (1904-1978), who is known to many chess players for his win against Emanuel Lasker in Moscow 1925.

Before competing in such events, I like deepening my knowledge of the person in whose honour the tournament is held, but despite all your attempts it is obviously difficult to get an image of a person from a bygone era, someone you have never seen or known. It was very different when I joined Anish Giri to travel to the Vugar Gashimov Memorial. Vugar, who tragically died at the age of 27 only two years ago, was a player of my own generation. We played multiple times, and it remains difficult to accept that he is no longer with us. I felt a strange mix of sadness and joy while walking around the playing area; sadness for obvious reasons, joy for the fact that in Azerbaijan they know how to commemorate their heroes. This third edition of the super-tournament in Shamkir was a successful attempt by the organizers to keep his light shining.

In the memory of
VUGAR GASHIMOV
SHAMKIR 2
Chess
In the mem
VUGAR
SYNERG
GROUP

In the past, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov sometimes gave up on a tournament after a loss, but not so in Shamkir. With a stunning finish the Azeri grandmaster bounced back to claim the third super-tournament in the memory of his friend Vugar Gashimov.

The course of the tournament can be summarized with an African proverb: Two birds were fighting about a seed, when a third swooped down and carried it off. It seemed clear that either Fabiano Caruana or Anish Giri was going to win the event. Both were displaying fresh fighting chess, and going into the rest day, they led the pack with 4½/5 and 4/5, respectively. However, following that rest day a new tournament started. In this new event, consisting of the four remaining games, both Fabiano and Anish scored a meagre –1, allowing Shakhriyar Mamedyarov to catch up, much to the delight of the local fans.

Shakh had started the tournament somewhat slowly, losing his Round 2 game against Pentala Harikrishna. In the past, Mamedyarov sometimes gave up on a tournament after a loss, but the Azeri has undeniably matured in recent years. Earlier this year, for example, Mamedyarov blundered a full rook in a completely winning position against Eljanov in Wijk aan Zee. The very next day he effortlessly drew Magnus Carlsen with the black pieces as if nothing had happened. Asked by commentator Yasser Seirawan what had given him the strength to play the way he did after the drama in the previous round, Shakh explained that such things were no longer getting to him, because he had learned that ‘life is more important’ – a direct reference to Gashimov.

Because of that attitude, the tournament was truly heading for a dream finale; but let us first have a look at the rest of the field.

Hou Yifan had a tough time in Shamkir. The Women’s World Champion, who recently expressed her

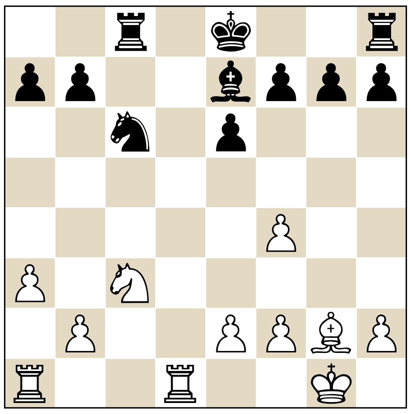
in the memory of
VUGAR GASHIMOV

ETERI KUBLASHVILI

In a unique partnership Sergey Tiviakov and Ljubomir Ljubojevic provided the online commentary.

intention not to defend the title if the current cycle isn't changed dramatically, was a bit unlucky in her opening choices, a clear example being her last-round loss to Rauf Mamedov.

In a unique partnership with living legend Ljubomir Ljubojevic, online commentary was provided by Sergey Tiviakov in his characteristic clear and straightforward style. On the first day of the tournament, Sergey showed his benevolence when he attempted to steal Nigel Short's limelight by making a few observations on women's chess. This caused quite some consternation on the most important place on earth: Twitter. Ironically, it was exactly during this first round that Hou Yifan made a decision that, as far as I'm concerned, can go straight into the textbooks.

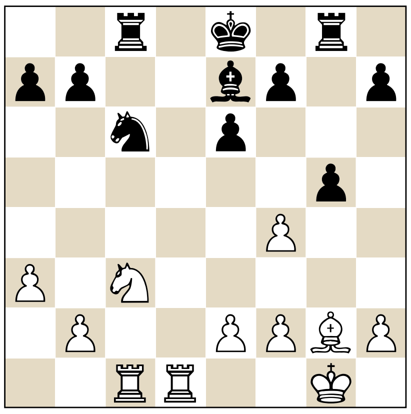


Radjabov-Hou Yifan
Shamkir 2016 (1)
position after 20.♖fd1

Not the most exciting of positions, but White has pressure on the long diagonal, and if he'd been given two moves, ♖ac1 and ♘b5, this might have resulted into something serious. Black's main problem is the fact that the h8-rook is out of play.

20...♖g8! I admit that 20...♗f6 also holds, but here, amongst other things, White can play 21.♘e4 ♔e7 22.♘xf6 gxf6 23.♖ac1, when 23...♖hd8 24.♖xd8 ♔xd8 25.♗xc6 ♖xc6 26.♖xc6 bxc6 leads to a pawn ending that Black should hold. From afar, though, taking a decision of such magnitude is not very practical.

21.♖ac1 g5!



The point. Black develops her rook via the g-file.

22.fxg5 22.f5!? was discussed during the press conference as an attempt to keep the game going, but after 22...exf5 the rook will enter the fray via g6.

22...♖xg5 23.♔f1 ♖c5 24.♘e4 ♖xc1 25.♖xc1 f5 26.♘d2 ♔d7

And the game was drawn shortly afterwards. An elegant solution by the Chinese!

Overall, Hou Yifan drew five of her games and lost four, and she will probably quickly want to leave the tournament behind her. The same goes for Pavel Eljanov who, after a fantastic year 2015, received an invitation for the two super-tournaments in Stavanger and Shamkir. Neither of them went according to plan for the likeable Ukrainian. A small ray of light was his win over Hou Yifan, which prevented him from ending up in last place. Pasha is a very streaky player and ups-and-downs are part of that. I have no doubt he will be showing his true self again soon!

Lack of rhythm

Before the event I was curious to know what Teimour Radjabov could do in this event. Just three years ago, his rating was a whopping 2799 and he was one of the favourites going into the Candidates' in London. That feels like a long time ago now. Radjabov was not able to live up to expectations in that Candidates Tournament and has been struggling ever since to show his best chess.

Shamkir was no turnaround, the root cause seemed to be lack of rhythm. Radja's last event before Shamkir was the European Team Championship in Reykjavik, well over six months ago. His play was rusty, too rusty. The one game that he lost was conducted brilliantly by his opponent.

SI 31.7 – B31
Fabiano Caruana
Teimour Radjabov
Shamkir 2016 (5)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5

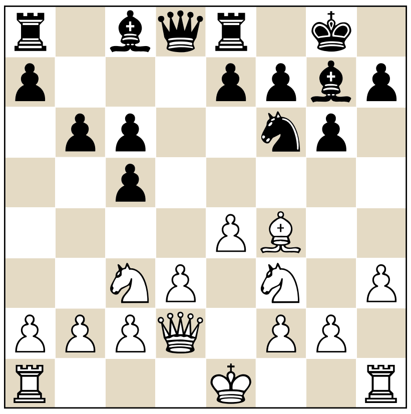
Later on in this report we will see 3.d4 from Caruana.

3...g6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.h3 ♘f6 7.♘c3 0-0

‘On the first day Sergey Tiviakov showed his benevolence when he attempted to steal Nigel Short’s limelight by making a few observations on women’s chess.’

Carlsen played the more flexible 7...b6 against Caruana, analysed by Peter Heine Nielsen in New In Chess 2015/1. No doubt Fabiano had his own thoughts on that game.

8.♗f4 b6 9.♕d2 ♖e8

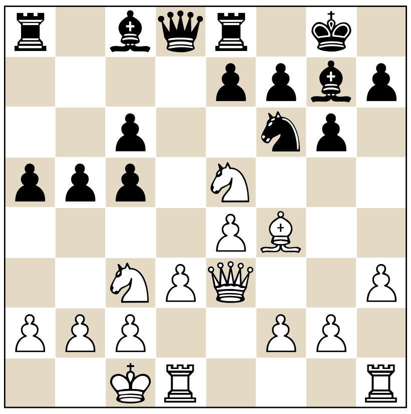


10.0-0-0!? Very daring. Teimour now started burning a lot of time trying to find the best way to organize play on the queenside.

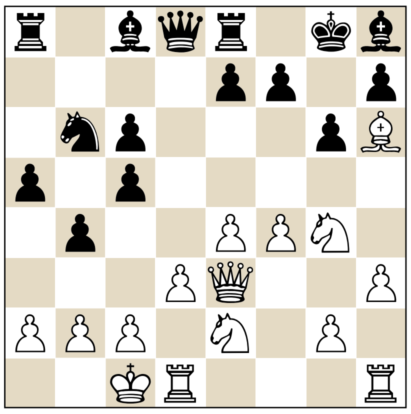
10...a5 Perhaps a bit slow. Every tempo counts in this position, and I would suggest 10...b5!? as a possible improvement. Now the game continuation 11.♘e5 runs into 11...♕a5! 12.♘xc6 ♕a6! while 11.♔b1 a5, and 11.♕e3 ♕b6 12.♗h6 ♗h8 are also far from clear.

11.♘e5 b5 12.♕e3

White wisely ignores the pawn on c6, since 12.♘xc6 ♕b6 13.♘e5 a4 gives Black a lot of time on the queenside. Caruana’s move is prophylaxis against 12.♗h6 ♘xe4!.



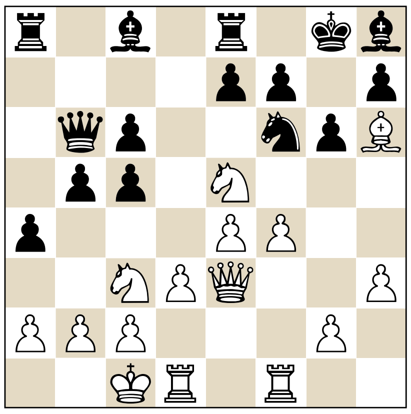
12...♕b6 On Twitter, Teimour mentioned that this is a mistake after which the position is worse for Black. He proposes 12...♘d7 13.♘xd7 ♗d4! 14.♕g3 ♕xd7 as an improvement over the game. He also suggests 13.♘g4 ♘b6! for counterplay, and indeed 14.♘e2 b4 15.♗h6 ♗h8 16.f4 leads to a position in which Black has many interesting options. 16...c4, 16...b3!? and 16...a4 come to mind.



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

13.♗h6 ♗h8 14.f4 a4 The knight on e5 does a great job blocking the bishop on h8. Meanwhile, 14...♘d7 15.♘xd7 ♗xd7 16.e5! doesn’t solve the issue either. Black is already in trouble.

15.♖hf1



15...e6

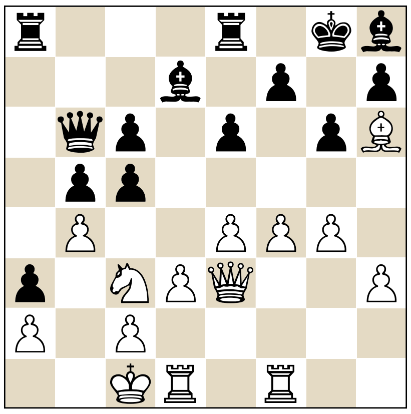
Once again, 15...♘d7 16.♘xd7 ♗xd7 17.e5! brings no relief, nor does 15...b4 16.♘e2 b3 17.cxb3 a3 18.bxa3 ♖xa3 19.♖d2 ♗e6, when 20.♔d1! is the only move to gain an advantage. But it is a good one! White prepares to solidify the queenside with ♘c1.

16.g4 a3 17.b4!

Energetic play by Fabi!

In Round 5 Fabiano Caruana took his score to 4½/5 with a brilliant win over Teimour Radjabov, who again was only a shadow of the 2799 player he was only three years ago.

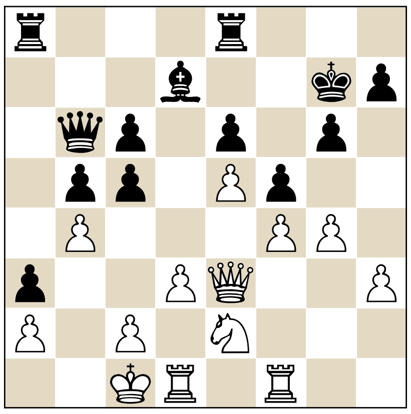
17...♘d7 18.♘xd7 ♗xd7



19.e5 Incarcerating Black's bishop on h8 and thereby cementing White's huge positional advantage.

19...f5 Forced, so as to prevent the white knight from reaching e4.

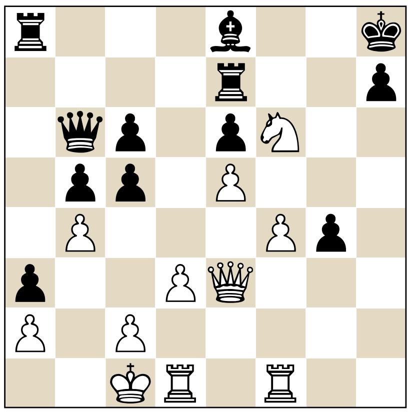
20.♘e2 ♗g7 21.♗xg7 ♔xg7



22.h4!

Lesser mortals would perhaps have been happy to grab a mere pawn with 22.♕xc5 ♕xc5 23.bxc5 b4, which is still a bit of a technical job. Now that Black's dark-squared bishop has been exchanged, Caruana wants to get to the king!

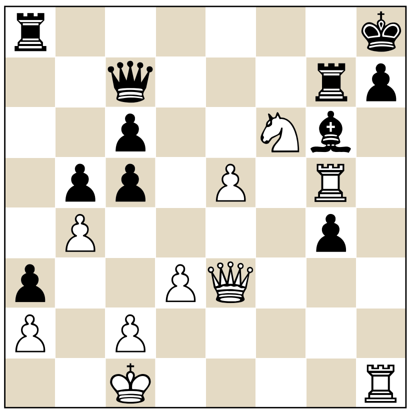
22...fxg4 23.h5 gxh5 24.♘g3 ♔h8 25.♘xh5 ♖e7 26.♘f6 ♗e8



27.f5!

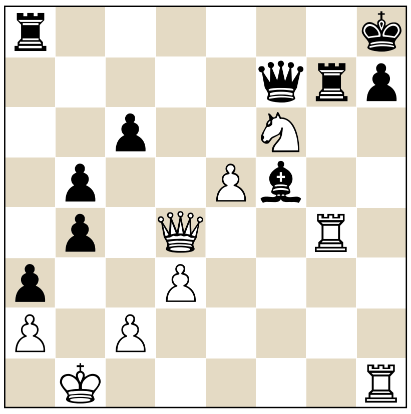
Not allowing 27.♖h1 ♗g6!.

27...exf5 28.♖xf5 ♕c7 29.♖g5 ♖g7 30.♖h1 ♗g6

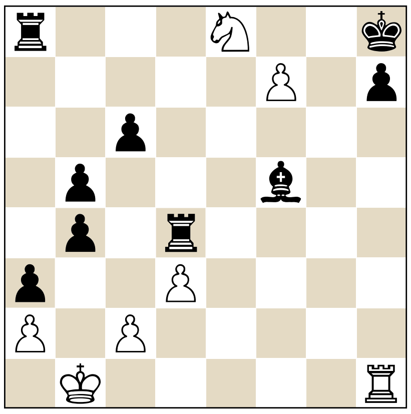


White is completely winning, but Fabiano's clock dropped to mere seconds around here. Fortunately for him, the position is just too good for time-trouble to spoil it.

31.♖xg4 ♕f7 32.♔b1 cxb4 33.♕d4 ♗f5 Allowing a pretty finish.



34.e6! ♖xg4 35.exf7 ♖xd4 36.♘e8!



And Black resigned. There is no stopping f8♕+.

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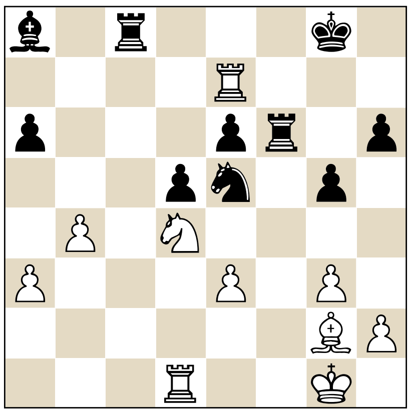
Pentala Harikrishna is of the same school as Magnus Carlsen, inasmuch that both don't place too much emphasis on the openings.

For the two other locals, Eltaj Safarli and Rauf Mamedov, expectations obviously were more modest. Rauf played a particularly solid tournament, in which only Caruana managed to get the better of him. As mentioned earlier, he then bounced back to 50 per cent with a last-round win over Hou Yifan.

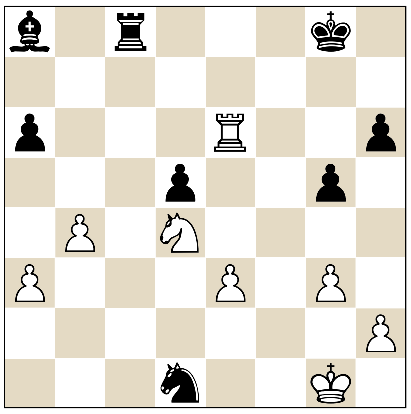
Safarli had a tougher time. With six draws and two losses under his belt he started his last-round game against Pentala Harikrishna. Harikrishna, just like Eljanov, had had a fantastic spell. The Indian has won so much rating that wherever I am on the worldwide web, all I see is updates by Sagar Shah on the minor rating difference between Hari and Anand.

Harikrishna is of the same school as Carlsen, inasmuch that both don't place too much emphasis on the openings. Both are very strong when it comes to avoiding the opponent's opening preparation and just getting 'a game'. In Stavanger, Pentala had already shown that when it comes to top chess, he is here to stay. In Shamkir his performance was solid as well. Going into the final round with a 50% score, he was keen to bring it to plus 1. Then the following happened.


Harikrishna-Safarli
Shamkir 2016 (9)
position after 31.♖d1

In an attempt for counterplay Safarli jumped **31...♘g4**, when 32.♖f1! ♖xf1+ 33.♗xf1 ♘xe3 34.♗xa6 looks like the end of a Kasparian study on the theme of domination. Instead Hari thought he saw an easier way and played **32.♗h3?**, blundering the fork **32...♘f2**

That, however, was not the end of the story. After the further **33.♗xe6+ ♖xe6 34.♖xe6 ♘xd1** Black would still have been far from winning after, say, 35.♖xh6. Flustered by what had happened, White went astray once more with:



35.♘f5? when **35...♖c1!** sealed the deal.

A million dollars

Which brings us to the Challenger! Rumour has it that Sergey Karjakin has received a million dollars in sponsorship to cover the expenses of his upcoming match with Magnus Carlsen. Way to go, Sergey! Karjakin had previously cancelled his participation in Norway Chess, but wanted to be present in Shamkir to honour his friend Vugar. His play did not boil over from ambition, and an early loss against Giri ruled him out as a contender for first place. It is clear that Sergey has bigger goals in mind. Of course, Magnus will be the favourite in New York (Moscow? Sochi?! Khanty??), but Karjak has shown nerves of steel on numerous occasions and is about to ready himself for the biggest test in his career. I wouldn't be too eager to place any bets!

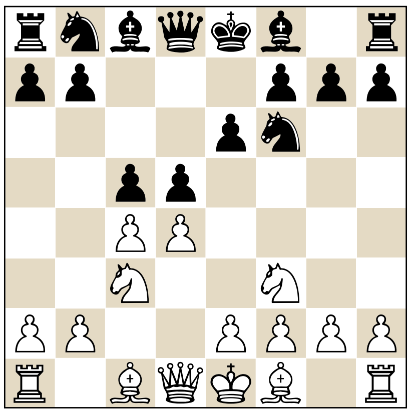
Let me now return to the beginning of this report, where I mentioned the race between Giri and Caruana. The spirit in 'team Giri' was rising with every passing round. After a disappointing Norway Chess, Anish was determined to set the record straight in Shamkir. And it showed! I'll give him the floor for his Round 4 victory over Pentala Harikrishna.

NOTES BY
Anish Giri

TD 2.9 – D41
Anish Giri
Pentala Harikrishna
Shamkir 2016 (4)

I trust that when it comes to the lyrical bits on the Vugar Gashimov memorial you will be fine in the hands of my friend Erwin l'Ami. So, without further ado, I will turn to the game. At this point I had already won one game, and now I wanted to build on that success.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 c5



Hari started playing this system recently. The main purpose is to trade a lot of pieces as fast as possible. The system has gained some popularity thanks to the efforts of Vladimir Kramnik, though his results have been far worse than the positions he got out of the opening.

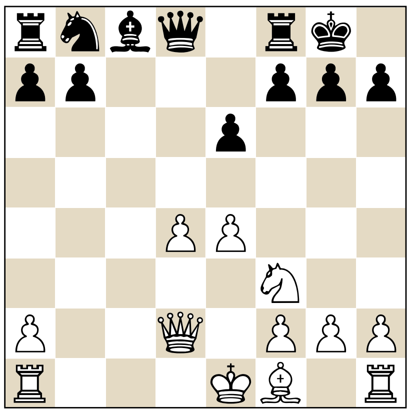
5.cxd5 ♘xd5

5...cxd4 is even more ambitious when it comes to trading pieces. After 6.♕xd4 exd5 7.e4 ♘c6 8.♗b5 dxe4 9.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 10.♘g5 ♗e6 Black will end up suffering, but the position is very drawish already.

6.e4

The only ambitious way forward, although rare moves like 6.e3 and 6.g3 are also playable.

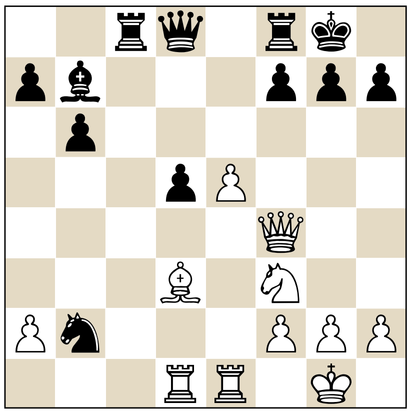
6...♘xc3 7.bxc3 cxd4 8.cxd4 ♗b4+ 9.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 10.♕xd2 0-0



A tabiya in this line. Previously White played 11.♗c4 exclusively, and Black would reply 11...♘c6. Since then the theory has made a few steps forward.

11.♖c1

The following game is a classic evergreen that featured an ideal recipe for dealing with this system with the knight on c6: 11.♗c4 ♘c6 12.0-0 b6 13.♖ad1 ♘a5 14.♗d3 ♗b7 15.♖fe1 ♖c8 16.d5!! – the break I managed to execute as well. 16...exd5 17.e5 ♘c4 18.♕f4 ♘b2



This forces White to take immediate action, but it loses by force. 19.♗xh7+! (the point!) 19...♔xh7 20.♘g5+ ♔g6 21.h4! ♖c4 22.h5+ ♔h6 23.♘xf7+ ♔h7 24.♕f5+ ♔g8 25.e6 ♕f6 26.♕xf6 gxf6 27.♖d2 ♖c6 28.♖xb2 ♖e8 29.♘h6+ ♔h7 30.♘f5. I have heard legends about Polugaevsky's preparation. It is very likely that he had been aware of this position beforehand.

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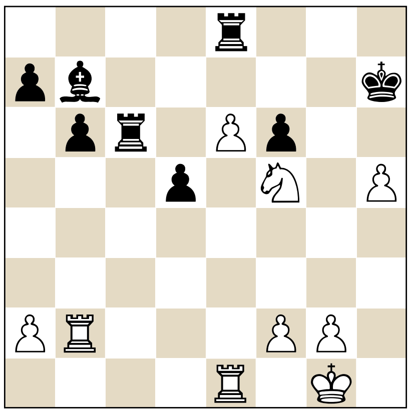
ETERI KUBLASHVILI

Anish Giri was successful in his game against Pentala Harikrishna with a new idea that he and his second Erwin l'Ami had 'stumbled on'.



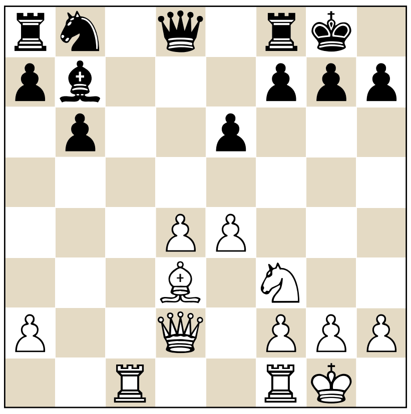
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

30...♖exe6 31.♖xe6 ♖xe6 32.♖c2 ♖c6 33.♖e2 ♗c8 34.♖e7+ ♔h8 35.♘h4 f5 36.♘g6+ ♔g8 37.♖xa7 1-0, Polugaevsky-Tal, Moscow 1969. Unfortunately, many years after Tal lost this game, people began to realize that 11.♗c4 is met by 11...♘d7!. Then, after the eventual ...b6 and ...♗b7, the bishop is better placed on d3, where it defends the e4-pawn. Then, even smarter people realized it makes sense to wait and see where the knight goes, before deciding on the f1-bishop's placement.

11...b6

11...♘c6 is the move I expected, as Hari had played it a few times already. However, one can never exclude the possibility of an opponent following in the footsteps of Vladimir Kramnik, one of the greatest opening specialists of our time.

12.♗d3 ♗b7 13.0-0

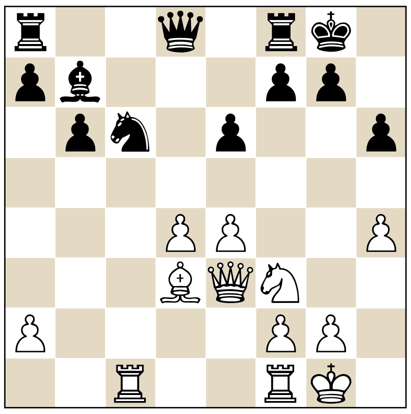


13...h6

Kramnik introduced this cunning move in his game against Mamedyarov in the very same Gashimov Memorial one year ago. Mamedyarov won that game, but Black's play could definitely have been improved. The point is to retain the flexibility of the b8-knight.

13...♘d7 is less sophisticated and more natural, but Aronian managed to outplay Kramnik twice here: 14.♕e3 ♘f6 (14...♖c8 15.e5! Aronian-Kramnik, Alekhine Memorial 2013) 15.♘e5!, Aronian-Kramnik, Leuven blitz 2016.

14.♕e3 ♘c6 15.h4!?



A novelty, which Erwin and I stumbled upon. Mamedyarov started with 15.♖fd1, but as will be evident later on, there is no time for this reasonably useful, but somewhat unnecessary move.

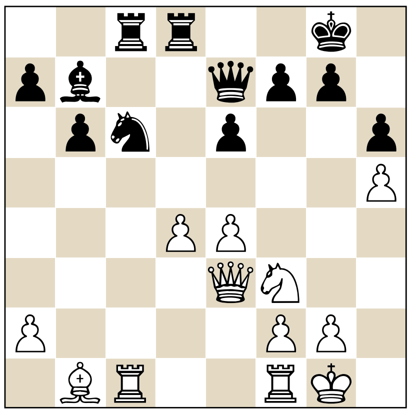
15...♖c8

The standard move; the rook joins the fight for the open c-file.

16.h5 ♕e7

I didn't remember all the options we considered for Black here, but fortunately the plan was identical: h4-h5, drop the bishop to b1 and push d5.

17.♗b1 ♖fd8?!



It is hard to find a more normal move than this one. Here my first instinct was to follow up with the natural ♖fd1, but then I realized that after

18.♖fd1 ♘b8! the knight is in time to get to f8 to protect the h7-square. This forced me to consider the standard pawn sacrifice seriously.

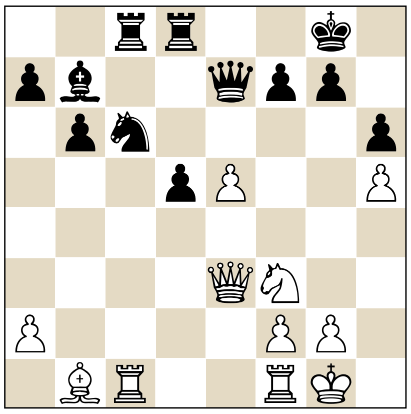
17...♘b8 feels premature as after 18.e5 ♘d7 19.♕d3 Black is forced to weaken himself with 19...f5, when after 20.exf6 ♘xf6 21.♘e5 Black is very likely doing alright. I am not going to overrule the opinion of my engine, but aesthetically speaking it doesn't look all too pretty, the hole on g6 in particular.

18.d5! 18.♖fd1?! ♘b8! would end my attack before it had even started: 19.d5 (19.e5 ♘d7 20.♕d3 ♘f8!) 19...exd5 20.e5 ♘d7 21.♕d3 ♘f8!.

18...exd5

Hari spent a lot of time here and probably failed to find a satisfactory way forward. Finally he decided to just grab the pawn and see how to defend later. Moving the knight away would give White too many promising options.

19.e5



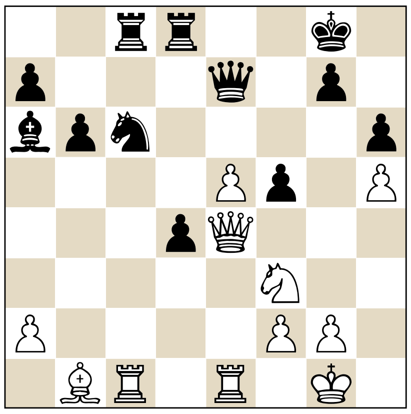
19...♗a6

19...♔f8 was the move I had expected, anticipating ♕d3-h7. White has fantastic compensation here. One sample line runs 20.♖fe1 ♖c7 21.♕f4 ♗c8 22.e6!? ♕d6 23.♕f5 ♗xe6 24.♕h7 ♘e5! 25.♘d4!, and sooner or later ♕h8+ and ♕xg7 will happen and Black will not enjoy it.

20.♖fe1 ♕d7

A very passive defensive set-up. However, it still requires some precision from White to make sure his initiative is going to result into something tangible.

20...d4 21.♕e4 f5 (21...d3 won't work: 22.♖xc6 ♗b7 23.♗xd3 ♖xd3 24.♖xc8+!)



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

was something I considered seriously. Now both captures of Black's f-pawn look promising for White, but I would go for the more ambitious 22.♕xf5!, keeping the queens. After 22...d3 23.♖cd1 both passed pawns

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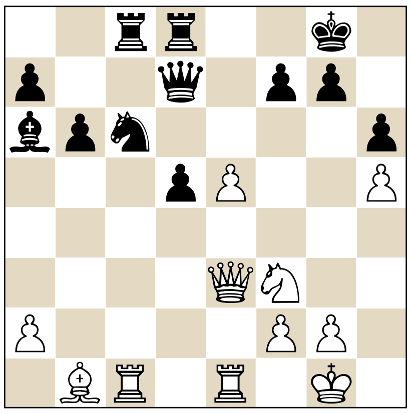
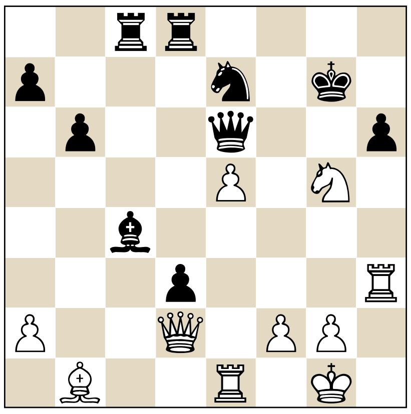
are safely blocked, but Black has some long-term weaknesses, including his king and the squares around it.



21.♕f4

I finally settled on this simple and very natural move, but the other path for the queen looked very seductive too.

After 21.♕a3!? the point is to reach the c2-square, when ♕h7+ will become a deadly threat: 21...♗c4 (after 21...♗b5 22.♕b2 ♗a4 White goes 23.♕d2!, followed by either ♕d3 or ♕c2) 22.♕b2 ♕e6 23.♕c2 g6. This wasn't trivial, but justice prevails and White is on top after 24.♕d2 ♔g7 25.hxg6 fxg6 26.♘h4 ♘e7 27.♖c3 d4 28.♖h3 g5 (the toughest. 28...d3 29.♘xg6!) 29.♘f3 d3 30.♘xg5 and although it doesn't seem too obvious, considering the buried b1-bishop and the advanced black d-pawn, White's attack will lead to some material gains.

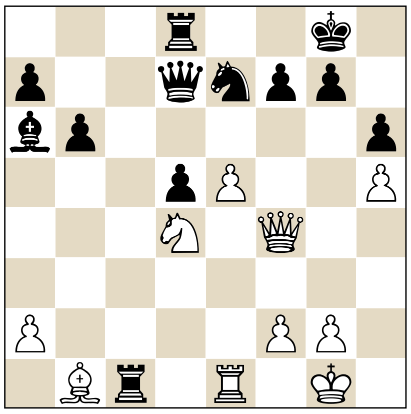


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

21...♘e7 22.♘d4

White's positional compensation is obvious. But if Black manages to trade the rooks along the c-file, White's initiative loses its sting.

22...♖xc1



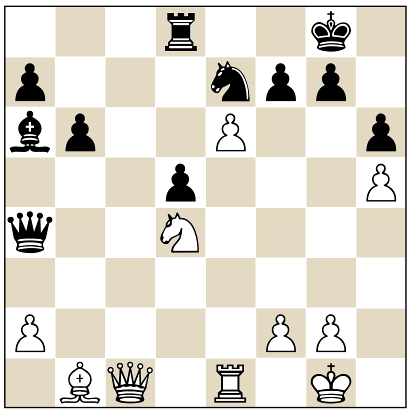
23.♕xc1! The key. 23.♖xc1 ♖c8 was Hari's intention, which wins Black some time: 24.♖e1 ♕c7!.

23...♕a4

23...♖c8 is now met by the gain of a tempo: 24.♕a3! ♗c4 25.♕g3! ♕c7 26.♕g4!, and here the bishop on c4 is misplaced, blocking both ...♕c4 and ...♕c3, which otherwise would allow Black to disrupt White's attack. Here e6 and ♘f5 are to follow.

24.e6! Another key move. My opponent thought the easy 24.♕c7 would win as well, but that actually wasn't the case.

After 24.♕c7 ♖f8! 25.♕xe7 ♕xd4 26.♗h7+ ♔xh7 27.♕xf8 appears winning, but after 27...♕d2! the rook has no escape.

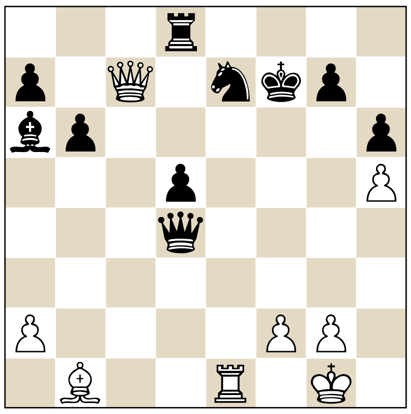


24...♕xd4?

In a bad position a blunder as such is a common occurrence. Not wanting to suffer, Hari didn't want to take the time to see why this doesn't work and just took the bait.

24...♖f8! was the only move. The position can probably be classified as lost. I had planned 25.♕e3, and now Black has many moves to continue suffering, but the more I look at the position, the better it looks for White.

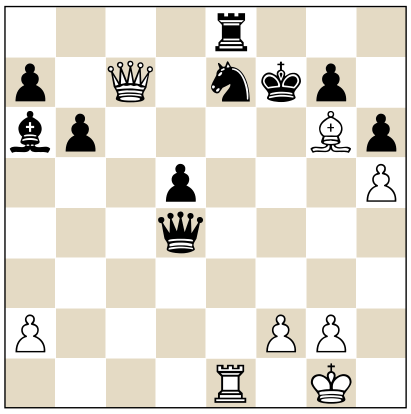
25.exf7+ ♔xf7 26.♕c7



26...♖e8

26...♖f8 now loses the exchange for real, as after 27.♕xe7+ ♔g8 28.♗h7+ ♔xh7 29.♕xf8 the same idea of 29...♕d2 doesn't work for many reasons, the main one being mate in 3 after 30.♕f5+ .

27.♗g6+



And Black resigned in view of 27...♔f8 28.♖xe7!, the move he had missed.

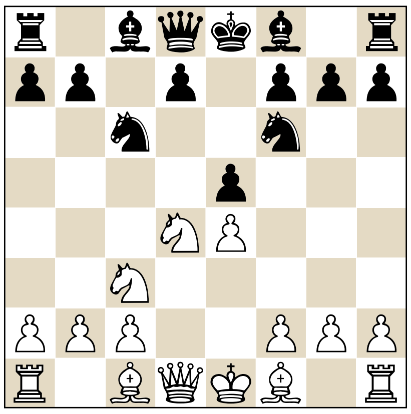
■ ■ ■

A further win in Round 5 took Anish's score to +3, after which it seemed to be smooth sailing towards the end. But this is where the second half of the event began. With the pace of Caruana and Giri slowing down there followed a very dramatic Round 8, in which Shakh, who had defeated Safarli the day before and moved to plus-1, was to take his first big step towards tournament victory. Here are his own notes to his crucial victory over Fabiano Caruana.

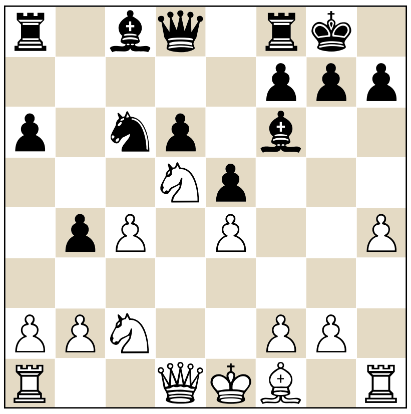
NOTES BY
Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

SI 37.8 – B33
Fabiano Caruana
Shakhriyar Mamedyarov
Shamkir 2016 (8)

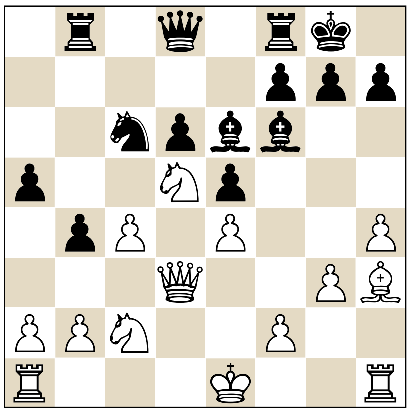
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6
I had not played this for many years, so Caruana didn't expect this move.
3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5



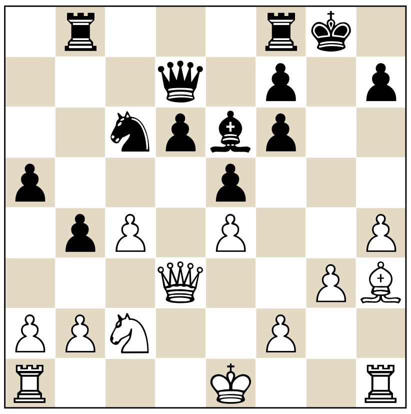
The Sveshnikov Variation, which has tons of theory.
6.♘db5 d6 7.♗g5 a6 8.♘a3 b5 9.♘d5 ♗e7 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.c4 b4 12.♘c2 0-0 13.h4



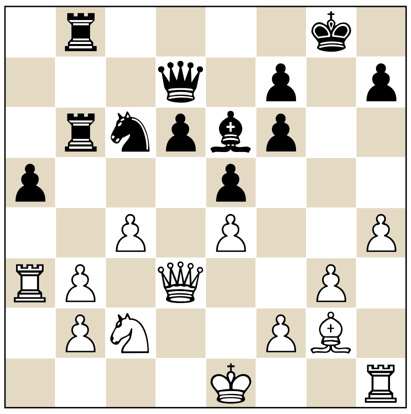
13...a5
Caruana played this line with Tregubov in 2012, and there Black went for 13...♖b8. But I did not know about that game and decided to play 13...a5 as I sat thinking at the board.
14.g3 ♗e6 15.♗h3 ♖b8 16.♕d3
As it turned out, we repeated till now the game Caruana-Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2014, but I didn't know about that game either... Caruana doesn't play this variation much; he mostly plays 3.♗b5.



16...♕d7!
An interesting move. Van Wely played 16...a4 here. The text-move is more dangerous for White.
17.♘xf6+ gxf6



18.♗f5!? A sharp try. After 18.♗g2 Black has 18...b3! 19.axb3 ♖b6! 20.♖a3 ♖fb8,



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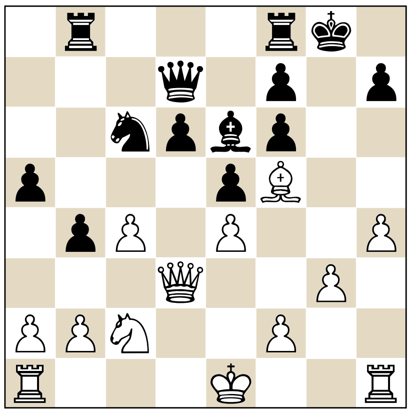
and now there are two ways that should lead to an equal game: 21.f4 ♕b7 22.f5 ♗d7 23.0-0 ♖xb3 24.♕xd6 ♔g7 25.♘e3 ♘d4! 26.♘d5 ♕c6 27.♕xc6 ♗xc6 28.♖xa5 ♖xb2 29.♖f2 ♖xf2 30.♔xf2 ♖b2+ 31.♔g1 ♖b1+, with a perpetual. Or 21.0-0 ♕b7 22.♘a1 ♘d4 23.♖xa5 ♘xb3 24.♘xb3 ♖xb3 25.♕xd6 ♖xb2 26.c5 ♖c8, with equality.
White could also try 18.♗xe6 fxe6, and now 19.♖d1 ♖bd8 20.0-0 f5, with unclear play.



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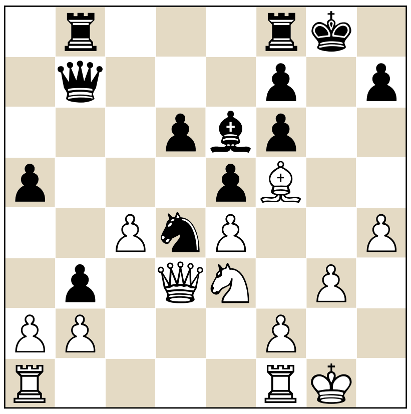
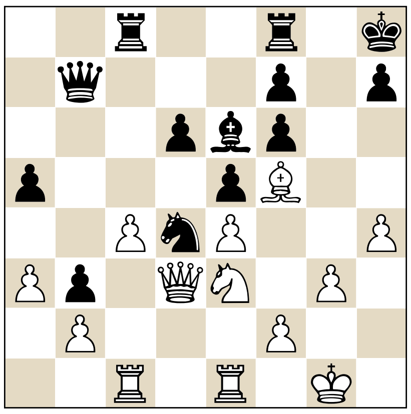
ETERI KUBLASHVILI

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov went looking for his chances against Fabiano Caruana with a double-edged Sveshnikov. In a tense fight the Azeri's courage paid off.

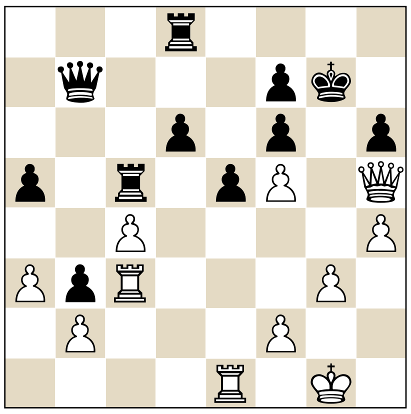
18...♕b7!? A rather risky move.
18...♗xf5! would have been enough to reach an equal and simple position. I think Black could make easy draw after 19.exf5 a4 20.b3 ♖fd8, and now, for instance, 21.♖d1 axb3 22.axb3 d5 23.cxd5 ♘d4 24.♘xd4 ♕xd5 25.0-0 ♕xd4 26.♕xd4 exd4 27.♖d2 ♖bc8 28.♖fd1 ♖c3 29.♖xd4 ♖xd4 30.♖xd4 ♖xb3, and this should end in a draw.
19.♘e3 ♘d4 20.0-0 b3!



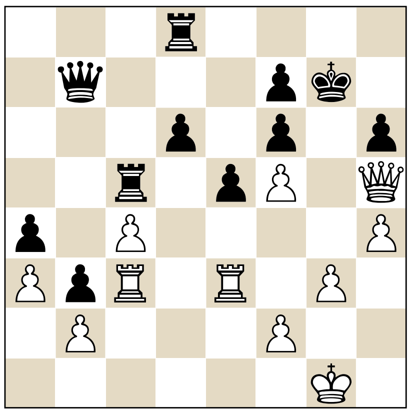
A very important move. Its main purpose is that White cannot defend c4 with his b-pawn. On top of that, the black b-pawn may become very dangerous in the future.
21.a3
After 21.♕d1 bxa2 22.♖xa2 ♗xf5 23.♘xf5 (23.exf5 ♕e4) 23...♘xf5 24.exf5 the position is approximately equal.
21...♔h8
I don't think this move made that much sense.
More in line with Black's plan was 21...♖fc8 22.♖ac1 ♖c5.
22.♖ac1 ♖bc8



23.♖fe1!?
Psychologically speaking a very interesting move. White offers Black an exchange, but accepting the sacrifice would change the course of the game and leave White with an active position that is more pleasant to play. After 23...♘f3+ 24.♔g2 ♘xe1+ 25.♖xe1 ♖g8 I'd prefer to play with White here. So that was why I didn't take the rook.
23...♖c5 24.♕d1 ♗xf5 25.♘xf5 ♘xf5 26.exf5 ♖d8 27.♕h5 ♔g7 28.♖c3 h6!
White was preparing to attack with g4 and then ♖g3, with a very strong attack. But here I took Fabiano by surprise by playing this unexpected move.



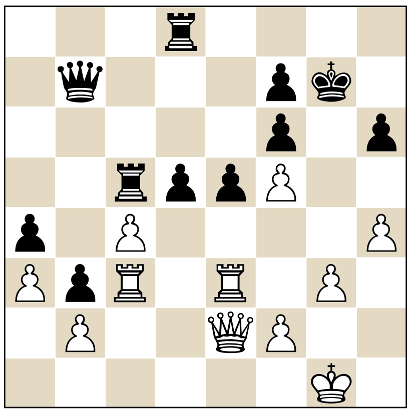
29.♖ee3?
White should have stopped the imminent black attack and fought for a draw. After 29.g4 ♖h8!, White cannot push g5 and the white queen is cut off.
In this dangerous position, with less time on the clock, White should have opted for 29.♕g4+ ♔h7 30.♕h5 a4 31.♖d1 ♔g7 32.♕g4+ ♔f8 33.♖d5 (after 33.♕h5 Black can try 33...d5) 33...♕c6 34.♕e2 ♔g7 35.♕g4+ ♔f8 36.♕e2, with a draw.
29...a4 Now Black is better.



30.♕e2
Another try was 30.♖ed3 d5 31.cxd5 ♖dxd5 32.♕f3 ♖xc3 33.♖xc3 ♕d7 34.♖c4 ♖d4 35.♖xd4 ♕xd4 36.♕e2, and although it's hard for White, he has a chance to defend.
Too risky is 30.f4 e4 31.♕g4+ ♔h7 32.♕d1 d5 33.♕d4 ♖dc8 34.♕xf6

♕d7!, and Black is calling the shots.

30...d5!

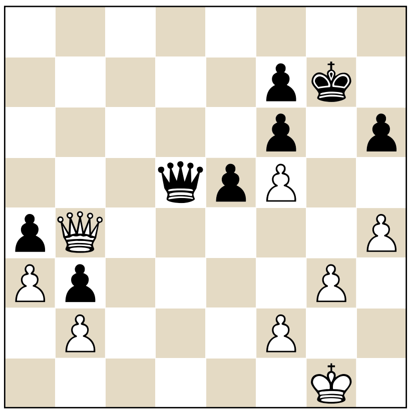


Time to activate the rooks!

31.♕f3?

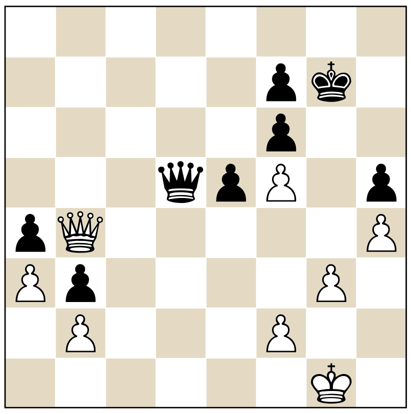
With little time left on the clock, Fabiano makes an important mistake. The only move to fight was 31.cxd5!, when Black should find 31...♖dxd5!. Not a comfortable move to decide on over the board (White should draw after 31...♖cxd5 32.♕f3 ♖d1+ 33.♔g2 ♕a6 34.♖e2! ♖1d2 35.♖xd2 ♖xd2 36.♖c7 ♕e2 37.♕xe2 ♖xe2 38.♖c4 ♖xb2 39.♖xa4 ♖a2 40.♖a8). 32.♕f3 ♖xc3 33.♖xc3 ♕d7 34.♖c4 ♖d4 35.♖xd4 ♕xd4, with chances for Black.

31...♖dc8! 32.cxd5 ♖xc3 33.♖xc3 ♖xc3 34.♕xc3 ♕xd5 35.♕b4



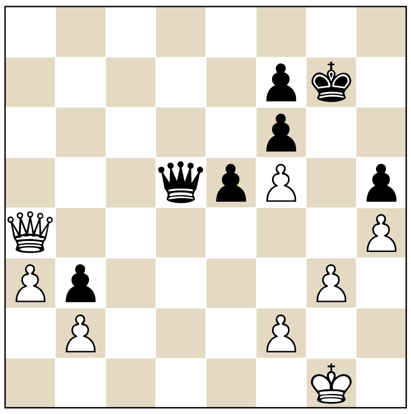
35...h5

Stronger was 35...e4!, when Black is winning very easily: 36.♕xa4 ♕d1+ 37.♔g2 ♕c2 38.♕d4 e3 39.♕xe3 ♕xb2 40.♕f3 h5 (or 40...♕c2 41.♕g4+ ♔h7 42.♕a4 h5, winning) 41.♕xh5 ♕d4 42.♕f3 ♕b6! 43.♕g4+ ♔f8, and Black wins.



36.♕xa4

After 36.g4, 36...♕d1+ 37.♔g2 hxg4 38.♕e4 ♕d4! is the only road to victory.

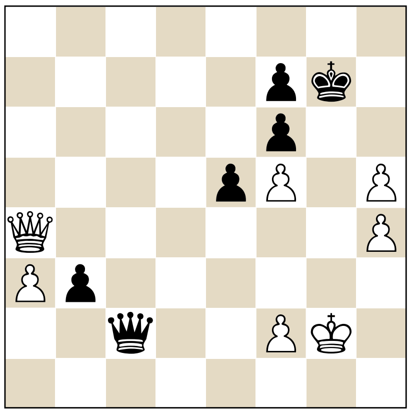


36...♕d3??

This move could have cost me the win, a very big mistake made in my opponent's time-trouble.

The only move to win the game was 36...e4!, and now 37.♕b4 ♕d1+ 38.♔g2 e3 39.fxe3 ♕e2+ 40.♔h3 ♕xb2 41.g4 ♕c2, and wins.

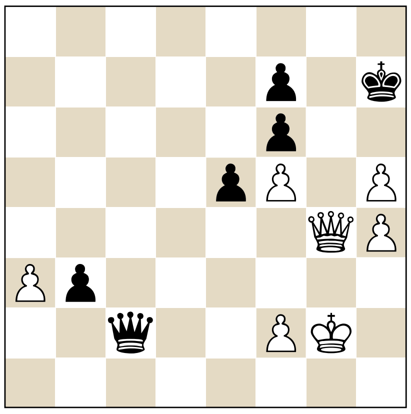
37.g4 ♕b1+ 38.♔g2 ♕xb2 39.gxh5 ♕c2



40.♕g4+

This is already drawish, but he had an even easier way to draw: 40.♕b4! b2 41.h6+ ♔xh6 42.♕f8+ ♔h5 43.♔g3 ♕c3+ 44.f3 ♕e1+ 45.♔g2 ♕xh4 46.♕xf7+ ♔g5 47.♕g8+ ♔xf5 48.♕c8+ ♔f4 49.♕c4+ e4 50.♕c7+ ♔g5 51.♕g7+, and draw.

40...♔h7



41.h6??

A losing mistake on move 41!

The only move was 41.♕a4!, and now

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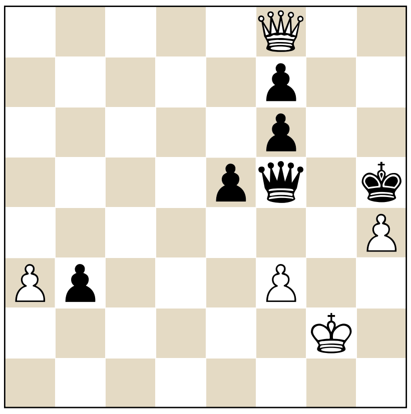
41...♕c3 42.♕d7 ♕c4 43.♕b7 e4 44.a4 leads to a draw. For instance, 44...e3 45.fxe3 ♕g4+ 46.♔f1 ♕xf5+ 47.♔e2 ♕c2+ 48.♔e1! (the only move – 48.♔f3 loses to 48...♔g7 49.h6+ ♔xh6 50.♕xf7 ♕f5+ 51.♔e2 b2) 48...♔g7 49.h6+ ♔xh6 50.♕xf7 ♕c3+ 51.♔e2 b2 52.♕f8+ ♔h5 53.♕e8+ ♔xh4 54.♕e4+, with a draw.

41...♔xh6 42.♕g8 ♕xf5 43.♕f8+ ♔h5 44.f3



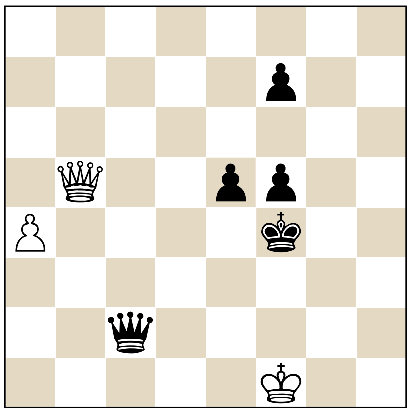
44...♔xh4

An easier way to win was 44...♕c2+! 45.♔g3 ♕c4! 46.♕h8+ ♔g6 47.h5+ ♔g5, and White can resign.

45.♕b4+ ♕f4 46.♕xb3 ♕d2+ 47.♔f1 ♔g3 48.f4+ ♔xf4

Black has a winning position.

49.a4 f5 50.♕b5 ♕d1+ 51.♔f2 ♕c2+ 52.♔f1



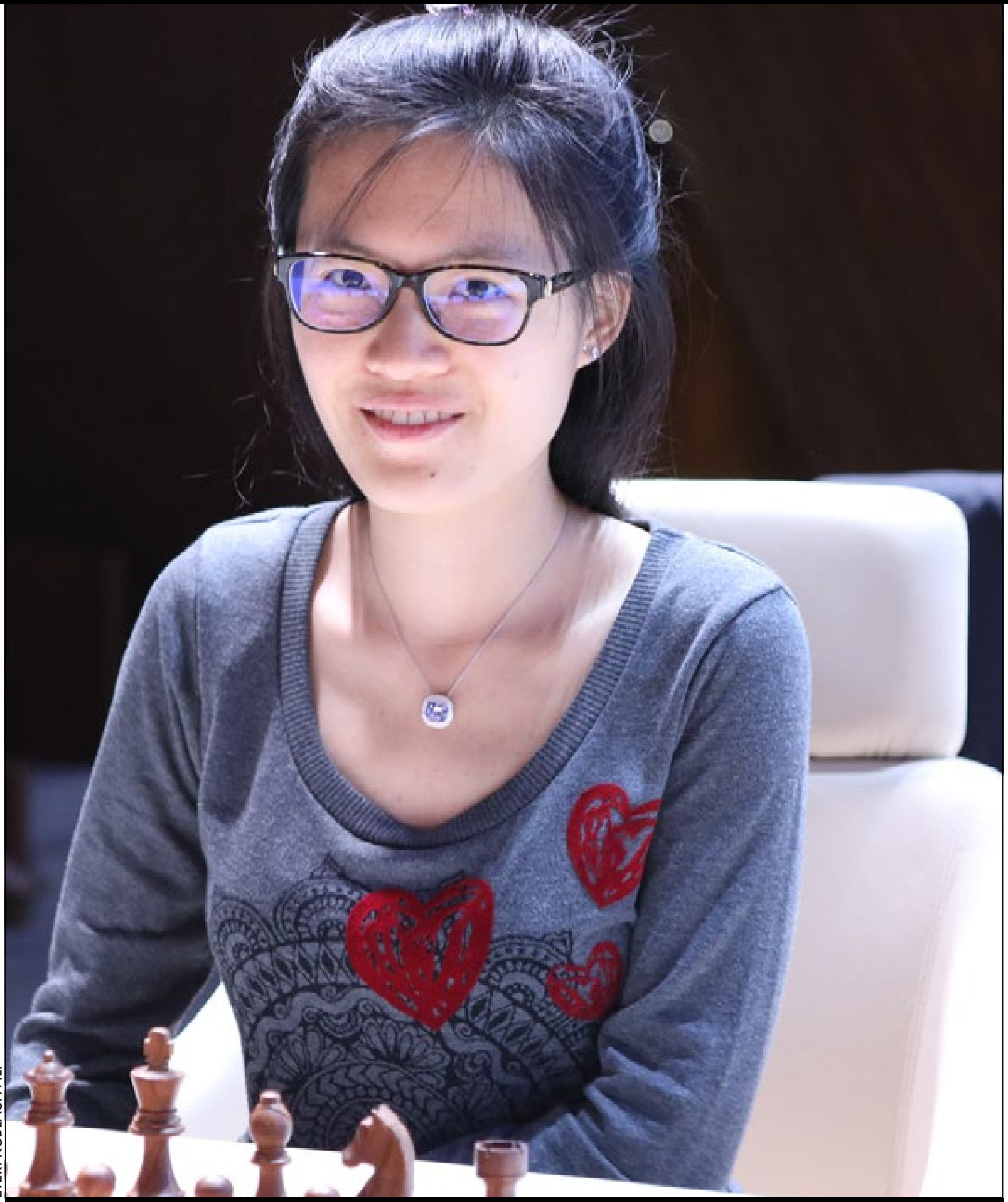
52...f6!

The simplest way to win, by just protecting the pawn on e5 and moving with the king.

53.♕b4+ e4 54.♕b5 ♔g3 55.♕e2 ♕xe2+ 56.♔xe2 f4 57.a5 f3+ 58.♔f1 e3

White resigned.

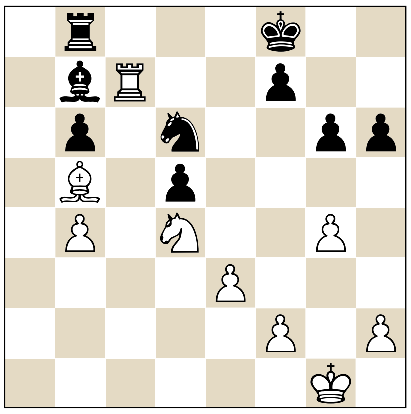
■ ■ ■



ETERI KUBLASHVILI

Hou Yifan had a tough time in Shamkir, but she stubbornly (and successfully) defended a 'miserable endgame' against Anish Giri.

Mamedyarov's victory meant that Giri could now overtake Caruana by half a point if he were to defeat a struggling Hou Yifan.

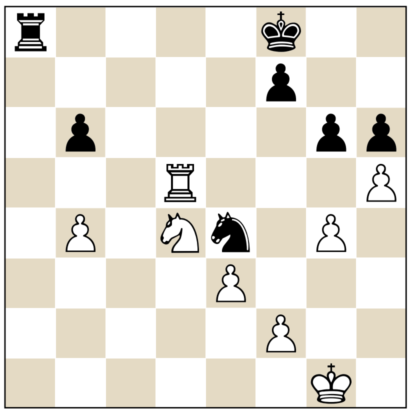


Giri-Hou Yifan
Shamkir 2016 (8)
position after 29...♔f8

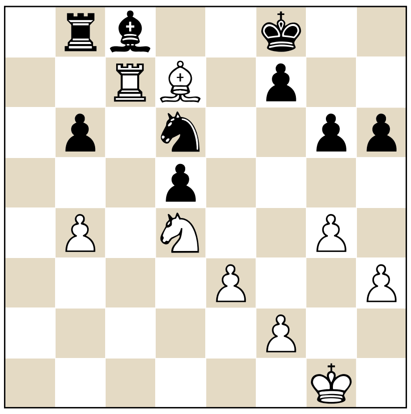
Hou had drifted into a miserable endgame after erring in the opening phase of the game.

30.♗d7 ♗c8 31.h3?!

I have to be harsh here and call this move inaccurate. 31.h4! is a much improved version after 31...♗xd7 32.♖xd7 ♘e4 33.h5! ♖a8 34.♖xd5, when both 34...♘f6 35.♖d6 ♘xg4 36.hxg6 and 34...♖a2 35.♖d8+ ♔g7 (35...♔e7 36.♘c6+ ♔e6 37.♖e8+ ♔d5 38.b5! threatens both ♘b4 and ♖e5) 36.f3 ♖a1+ 37.♔h2 ♖a2+ 38.♔h3 ♘d2 39.♔g3 look extremely promising for White.



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM



31...♗xd7!

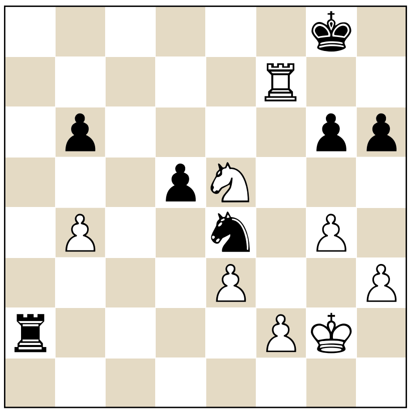
Hou Yifan seizes the moment, activating her pieces, even though it will cost her a pawn.

32.♖xd7 ♘e4 33.♘c6

33.♖xd5 ♖a8! 34.♖e5 ♘c3, followed by ♖a2, is what disturbed Anish. Instead, he sets his sights on the f7-pawn.

33...♖a8 34.♘e5 ♖a1+ 35.♔g2 ♖a2 36.♖xf7+ ♔g8

The pawn is in the pocket, but at a price. Black is active now and well-coordinated.



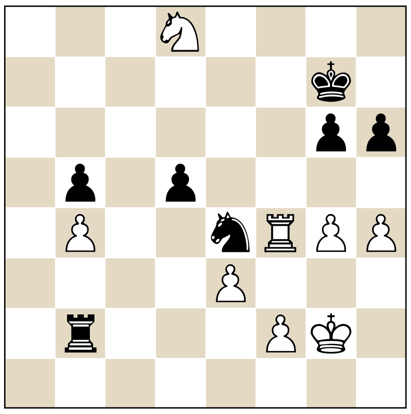
37.h4

37.♖f3!? is a very devious winning attempt. The idea is that after 37...♔g7 (37...g5 38.♘d7!) 38.h4 ♖b2?! there now is 39.♘d3 to f4! (this is why we went to f3 with the rook, rather than to f4). If not for 38...♖b2, White would continue h4-h5, making real headway on the kingside. Is this winning? Not sure Dirk Jan will be happy if I try to answer that question in this report, but it sure does look close!

37...♖b2 38.♖f4 ♔g7 39.♘c6

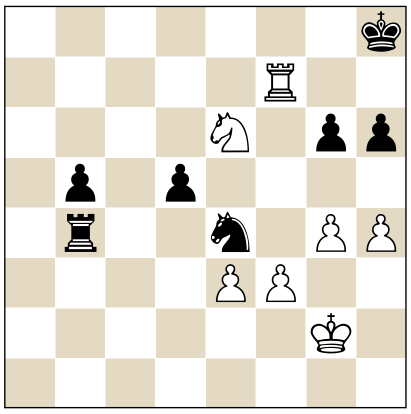
39.h5 g5 40.♖f7+ ♔g8 is not leading anywhere, so the b-pawn has to be defended.

39...b5 40.♘d8



Allowing a forcing sequence that lets Black off the hook. Note that I have been mainly focusing on the question whether White missed a win, but it should definitely be mentioned that Hou Yifan defended this endgame with remarkable tenacity.

40...♖xb4 41.♘e6+ ♔g8 42.♖f8+ ♔h7 43.♖f7+ ♔h8 44.♖f8+ ♔h7 45.♖f7+ ♔h8 46.f3

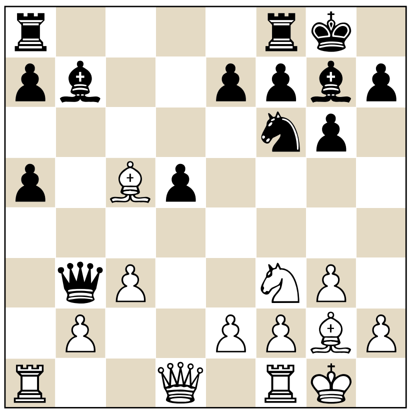


This would have been very strong, were it not for:

46...♖b2+! 47.♔h3 ♖e2! 48.♖f8+ ♔h7 49.♖f7+ ♔h8 50.♖f8+ ♔h7 51.fxe4 ♖xe3+ 52.♔h2 ♖xe4

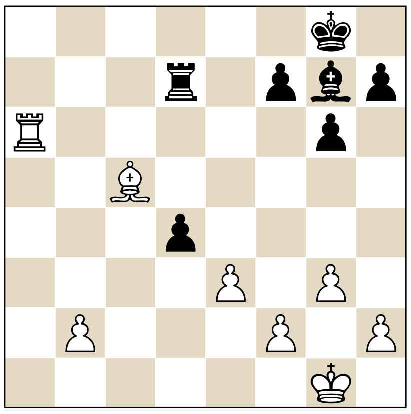
And, as it turns out, White can't keep his pawns. Soon all of them disappeared, and Hou Yifan had no problems holding rook and knight vs rook. That is an endgame that is very difficult to lose indeed...

Shakhriyar, now half a point behind both Giri and Caruana, had to face Anish Giri in a thrilling last round. When Karjakin and Caruana quickly drew their last-round encounter, Mamedyarov knew a win would guarantee him a tiebreak with Fabiano. Anish would reach a tiebreak with Fabiano if he drew and take outright first if he won. The game itself can be cut down to two diagrams:



Mamedyarov-Giri
Shamkir 2016 (9)
position after 14.♗xc5

Here, rather than **14...♕xd1 15.♖fxd1 ♖fe8 16.♖xa5,** with a clearly worse endgame, Black could have played the daring 14...♕xb2! 15.♖b1 ♕xc3, when both bishops are hanging. The line continues 16.♗xe7 ♖fb8 17.♗d6, when Black actually has the luxury of choice: 17...♖e8 18.♖xb7 ♕c6!, when 19.♖xf7 is calmly met by 19...♕xd6, or 17...♘e4!? 18.♗xb8 ♖xb8, with surprisingly good compensation. Perhaps White's best choice would be to simply repeat moves with 16.♖c1 ♕b2 17.♖b1 etc.



position after 33.♖xa6

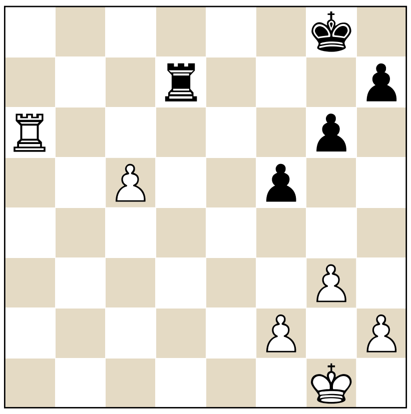
We have made a little jump. Black has lost a pawn and cannot play 33...d3 because of the back rank check. He will first have to stop that threat. The best way to do this would be to play 33...h5, when 34.exd4 ♗xd4 35.b4 ♗xc5 36.bxc5 ♖d1+ 37.♔g2 ♖c1 38.♖c6 ♖c3 holds, practical

yar Mamedyarov
SYNERGY GROUP
SHAMKIR 2016 Chess In the memory of VUGAR GASHIMOV
Fabiano Caruana
Shakhriyar Mamedyarov

ETERI KUBLASHVILI

Time to celebrate! Shakhriyar Mamedyarov prevails in the blitz play-off against Fabiano Caruana to win the third Vugar Gashimov Memorial.

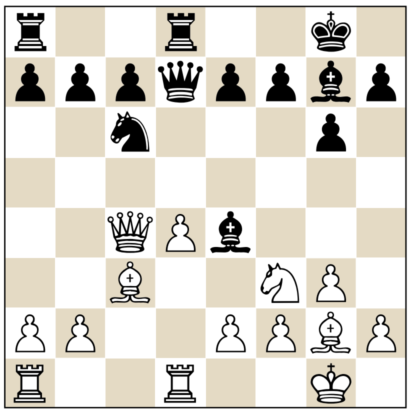
problems aside. In the game **33...f5** was played, causing the rook ending after **34.exd4 ♗xd4 35.b4 ♗xc5 36.bxc5**



36...♖d1+ 37.♔g2 ♖c1 38.♖c6 to be a lot less pleasant: Black's kingside is very vulnerable. Shakhriyar went on to win the endgame in a strong technical performance.

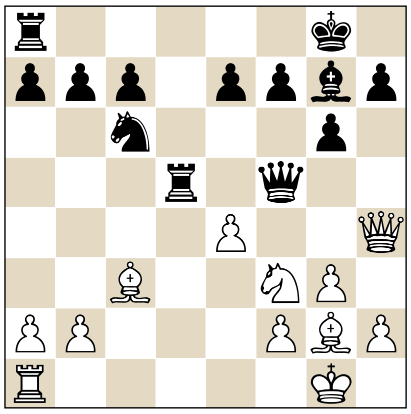
Blitz play-off

Which mean that a fully packed playing hall was now anticipating a tie-break! Caruana dominated the first two games and missed various chances to win at least one of them. The level of the games generally left something to be desired, but that's blitz for you, and who would blame the players after nine days of top chess. The third blitz game was won by Mamedyarov. For a second I felt as if I was in a football stadium, when Caruana extended his hand, while an explosion of clapping hands and screaming people filled the auditorium. As it turned out, most of the people were not aware of the fact that a fourth blitz game had to be played as well. There we saw Shakh in optima forma!



Mamedyarov-Caruana
Shamkir 2016 (tiebreak-4)
position after 13...♖fd8

I remember thinking that Black had done a very good job mixing things up until Shakh, after some pondering, lashed out **14.d5! ♗xd5 15.♕h4** Mamedyarov at his best! Suddenly all kinds of threats are in the air. It is a pity that after the further **15...♕f5** White failed to give the game a proper finish with 16.e4! ♕xe4 (16...♗xe4 17.♘g5!) 17.♖xd5! ♕xd5 18.♘g5, and wins. Instead, **16.♖xd5 ♖xd5 17.e4**



17...g5! allowed Black to stay in the game. Shakh liquidated to a more or less equal endgame with **18.♘xg5 ♕xg5 19.exd5 ♕xh4 20.gxh4** and moments later the audience could once again burst into applause when the draw was agreed. Their boy had completed an amazing streak, winning the last three games *and* the tiebreak to win the third Shamkir Chess in the memory of Vugar Gashimov! ■

Shamkir 2016 **cat. XX**

					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		TPR
1	**Shakhriyar Mamedyarov**	IGM	AZE	2748	*	1	1	½	½	0	½	1	1	½	6	2859
2	**Fabiano Caruana**	IGM	USA	2804	0	*	½	½	1	½	1	½	1	1	6	2853
3	**Anish Giri**	IGM	NED	2790	0	½	*	1	½	1	½	1	½	½	5½	2809
4	**Sergey Karjakin**	IGM	RUS	2779	½	½	0	*	½	1	½	½	½	1	5	2773
5	**Rauf Mamedov**	IGM	AZE	2655	½	0	½	½	*	½	½	½	½	1	4½	2744
6	**Pentala Harikrishna**	IGM	IND	2763	1	½	0	0	½	*	½	0	1	½	4	2689
7	**Teimour Radjabov**	IGM	AZE	2726	½	0	½	½	½	½	*	½	½	½	4	2693
8	**Eltaj Safarli**	IGM	AZE	2664	0	½	0	½	½	1	½	*	½	½	4	2700
9	**Pavel Eljanov**	IGM	UKR	2765	0	0	½	½	½	0	½	½	*	1	3½	2652
10	**Hou Yifan**	IGM	CHN	2663	½	0	½	0	0	½	½	½	0	*	2½	2577

Mamedyarov won the blitz play-off 2½-1½

Short Stories

NORDIC EXPEDITIONS

In May – those days of yore, when the name 'Iceland' did not, as yet, reduce grown Englishmen to inconsolable sobs – I travelled to Reykjavik, at the invitation of the irrepressible Hrafn Jökulsson, Chairman of the Hrokurinn Chess Club, for a 6-game rapid match against Hjörvar Steinn Gretarsson. Thirty-one years ago, as a teenager, when I played a round-robin in the Westman Islands, Iceland seemed a deeply mysterious and exotic destination. Now, even the most ill-educated English yob or bumpkin can tell you that the country possesses a population the size of Leicester and has – as Gary Lineker memorably quipped – '... more volcanoes than professional footballers'. As the mind-boggling passenger volume growth at Keflavik Airport (over 4 million in 2015) suggests, not a few of these yokels will have seen this geothermal Nordic nation at first hand.

To be honest, I didn't know too much about Hjörvar other than that he was a pleasant, red-haired young GM with an Elo of around 2570. The rating gap was clearly not so large that I could be confident of victory, particularly as I have struggled for form of late. Furthermore, my perennial allergy to the pollen of olive trees was so severe this year that I had been prostrated for weeks on end. In short, although recovering through heavy use of antihistamines, I was less than fully fit and woefully underprepared.

To add to these concerns, I had committed the extreme folly of agreeing to perform in a band, at a downtown bar on the Sunday evening after the match. I suspect my meddling old friend, Johann Hjartarson, was responsible for this reckless idea after hearing me jamming on acoustic guitar with his son, Hjörtur – a professional pianist – at his home back in November. Alas, what apparently sounds good in private with friends after a few bottles of wine, tends to sound less euphonious when stone-cold sober, on stage, in public. Hjörtur quickly assembled a group of chess-loving musicians, with Viggo Einar Hilmarsson – a fellow fretboard dilettante and CFO of match sponsors MotX – on lead guitar. I provided the sweetly punning, if not entirely original name – 'The Knight b4'. We were almost ready to rock. Now all we needed were some songs.

Given the very limited time available, a half-hour set was adjudged to be the maximum we could reasonably cope with. The rehearsals, in a large garage, were a frenetic race against the clock. I had the further energy-sapping distraction of giving a simul, in a shopping mall, in Kópavogur, on the Friday. Basically everything conspired against allowing the quiet, transcendental calm that was a requisite for the almost-forgotten purpose of my visit – the match itself.

At least my hotel, the former residence of the Prime Minister, Jon Magnusson, was spacious, splendid and centrally located – in stark contrast to the glorified rabbit hutch where I stayed for the European Team Championship in 2015. It was uplifting to know that when the ruling Danish king had visited in 1926, here is where he was quartered. Over coffee on the Saturday morning, I finally found time to switch on my laptop and make a rudimentary plan for the day ahead.

After some brief introductory words from the organisers and a surprise visit to the stage by Fridrik Olafsson – the last honourable man to be President of FIDE – the fight finally commenced. Playing White, I soon fell into serious trouble. For sure, I had been caught out in the opening, but this was not in itself fatal. My real problem was that my brain just wasn't functioning. Precious minutes were ticking by but I could barely calculate anything. Observing my position disintegrating before me, I waited to be put out of my misery. By a miracle it didn't happen. Becoming nervous, Hjörvar overlooked at least half a dozen wins. Somehow I grovelled to a rook and pawn endgame and by the narrowest of margins held on.

After this rude jolt, I drank a cup of coffee, splashed water on my face and hoped for better things. It worked to a degree. I felt sharper in the second game but, unfortunately, so did my opponent. I improved upon the same dodgy line of the English Defence with which I had succumbed to Ju Wenjun in New Zealand, but not sufficiently to make a difference. Playing powerfully and energetically, Hjörvar crashed through on the queenside before my counterplay could bear fruit.

Experience does, however, count for something. It was not the first time in my life that I had trailed in a match, so I knew it was not time to panic yet. I just had to change direction. The a3 Queen's Indian, which was the height of fashion in the early 80s, long before my opponent was born, seemed like a good choice. Indeed it soon became clear that my hunch was right: Hjörvar didn't quite feel the position. Squeezing steadily, I gradually brought in the full point. Overall, it was not impressive, but I had survived the first day more or less intact.

In 2002, I played a 6-game match, on a sacred Fischer-Spassky chess set, against the then Icelandic Champion, Hannes Stefansson. The struggle took a peculiar course when I scored just one draw out of the first two games, but then won four on the trot (one reason why I have always thought mini-matches to be worthless as genuine tests of strength). Hrafn kept reminding me of this, suggesting that I might repeat such an implausible sequence. How ridiculous!

The fourth game was pivotal. Scarred by the reversal in the second game, I chose instead to play classically. The untrendy Janowski Variation of the solid Queen's Gambit was the added slight twist of unpredictability. Hjörvar failed to spot the subtle differences between this and the main lines of the Carlsbad. I first equalized comfortably, before proceeding to rout him in the middlegame.

I sensed his spirit was broken after this. In the fifth game he played poorly and in the sixth committed a major positional crime. Hrafn's prediction had come true: I had won with the resounding score of 4½-1½. Of course, I was not the only one labouring under a handicap – Hjörvar had only just completed his law exams and was by no means as focused as he would otherwise have been.

All that remained, in Iceland, was for The Knight b4 gig. A blitz tournament at the Hurra bar ensured that it was packed with friendly chess players before we launched into our set, which included songs by the Beatles, REM, Neil Young, Traffic, the Cranberries, the Clash, and concluded with an improvised encore of *Wild Thing* by the Troggs. They loved it.

'Now, even the most ill-educated English yob or bumpkin can tell you that the country possesses a population the size of Leicester.'

The next morning the Hrokurinn contingent headed for the domestic terminal to board a turbo-prop for a flight to Nuuk, Greenland, where we were met by Petur Asgeirsson, the Icelandic Ambassador. The trip was actually my suggestion, but Hrafn, being a chess missionary, jumped at the opportunity to organise it. New In Chess readers may recall he was also behind the inaugural Greenlandic international tournament in Qaqortoq, in 2003, won by a rampaging Luke McShane (see New In Chess 2003/6). This time the centrepiece of the proselytising was an unrated rapid match in a shopping mall between Johann Hjartarson (the bane of Viktor Kortchnoi in their Candidates match in 1988), and myself. It was rather noisy, as you might expect, and at some point I told a guy in a green anorak, who was talking right next to our board, to shut up. It turned out he was the Prime Minister. In other countries I would be facing a lengthy custodial sentence for the crime of *lese majeste*, but Hrafn presented him with a set and he seemed pretty happy. Incidentally, I edged Johann in the Armageddon decider to take the Air Iceland trophy.

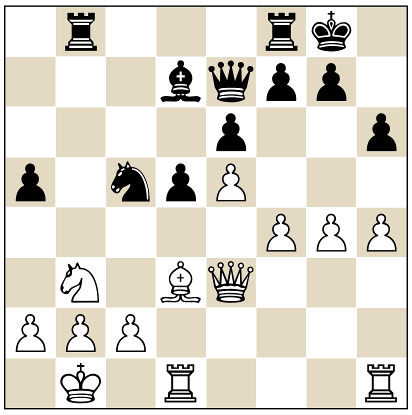
Johann and his lovely wife Jonina had to head back home, so they missed out on a fun outing to the prison. One of my Facebook friends served a life-sentence for murder and he has often told me how important chess was for keeping his sanity and warding off depression. The inmates were a little cagey at first, but soon warmed up to the strangers in their midst. The Egyptian arbiter Omar Salama and local player Malik Brons were led downstairs to face the more hardened criminals, who included a few foreigners. We feared they might not return. However, after an hour or so they reappeared. We donated some sets and said our goodbyes. It was a very enjoyable experience for all.

Our last blissful evening was spent in the company of several beautiful, highly-intelligent Inuit girls in a hut by the sea, playing chess and drinking merrily. Clearly there is a lot to be said for promoting chess in malls. Undoubtedly they will comprise the nucleus of the Greenlandic Women's Olympiad team in 2020, if only FIDE will have the sense to accept them. It is an extraordinary country and I cannot wait to return. ■

Recapturing counterintuitively

‘Always recapture with your pawn towards the centre’, they say. Well, there is a rule which allows for a great many exceptions, as **ARTHUR VAN DE OUDEWEETERING** shows.

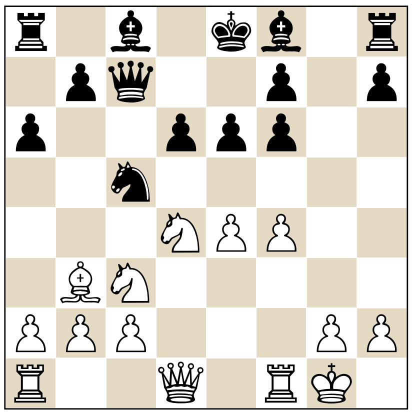
Let’s start off with a relatively easy and standard one. A well-known defensive mechanism to protect your king.



Yu Yangyi – Nguyen Ngoc Truong Son
Tabriz Asia Chess Cup 2014
position after 21.♘xb3

21...♘xb3 22.cxb3! This recapture is primarily intended to keep the a-file closed as long as possible. After 22.axb3 a4 Black can speed up his attack. **22...a4 23.f5** In different circumstances, 23.bxa4 would have been possible, but here it is refuted at once: 23...♖xb2+ 24.♔xb2 ♕b4+. **23...axb3 24.a3** Not, of course, 24.axb3 ♖xb3, with a devastating initiative. After the text Black’s attack comes to a standstill. The same mechanism also occurs with reversed colours, particularly in Sicilian attacks. Many things happened in this game, but eventually it ended in a draw.

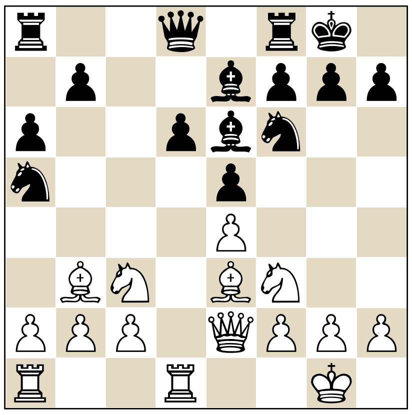
Another obvious incentive to capture towards the edge is a tempting half-open file. One theoretical example is 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♘xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.♗e3 ♘c5 10.♘c3 ♘xb3 11.cxb3!?, trying to exploit Black’s vulnerability on the c-file. Here is a more original one from a Sicilian.



Kulaots-Sarana
Moscow Aeroflot Open 2016
position after 11.f4

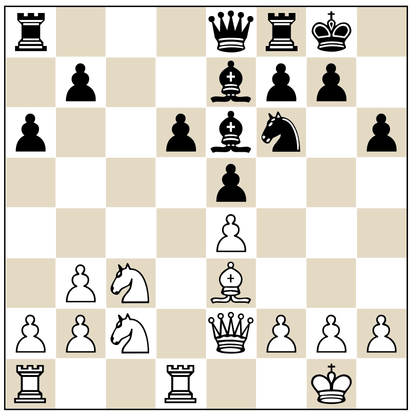
11...♘xb3 12.cxb3!? Enterprising play. An annoying vis-à-vis on the c-file is coming up, preventing Black from castling queenside. **12...♕b6 13.♔h1 ♗d7 14.♖c1** Now Black has no choice but to keep his king in the middle. **14...h5 15.f5 ♗e7 16.♕d3 ♖c8 17.♖cd1! ♖c5 18.♕g3 ♔d8** Black was already in great difficulty, but this attempt to castle artificially backfires: **19.fxe6 fxe6 20.♘a4 ♕a5 21.♘xe6+ ♗xe6 22.♖xd6+** The hard way. **22...♗d7 23.♘xc5 ♕xc5 24.♖d5 ♕c7 25.♕g7 1-0**

Less transparent at first glance is the following example:



Carlsen-Nunn
Amsterdam 2006
position after 12.♖fd1

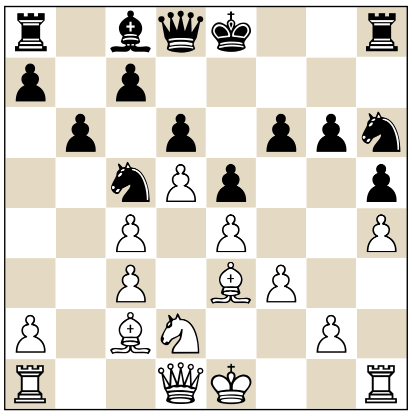
12...♘xb3 13.cxb3!? No defensive mechanism, no clear business on the c-file – what was young Magnus up to? **13...♕e8** White’s threat was 14.♘xe5, and now the c-file still appears to be of some importance: the natural 13...♕c7 will be met by 14.♖ac1. **14.♘e1 h6 15.♘c2!**



Thanks to 13.cxb3! From here the knight may go to b4 or e3, after which White can build a knight stronghold on d5. **15...♕d7 16.♘b4 ♖fc8 17.f3 ♗d8 18.♖d3 a5 19.♘bd5 ♘xd5 20.♘xd5 a4** Understandably, Nunn is casting around for activity. Now the damage to White’s pawn structure caused by his 13th move is repaired. **21.bxa4 ♖xa4 22.b3 ♖a6 23.♖ad1 ♖a5?** But this loses material. **24.♘b6 ♗xb6 25.♗xb6 ♖a6 26.♖xd6** And Carlsen duly won.

One good reason to take back ‘the other way’ is to vacate a square.

‘No defensive mechanism, no clear business on the c-file – what was young Magnus up to?’



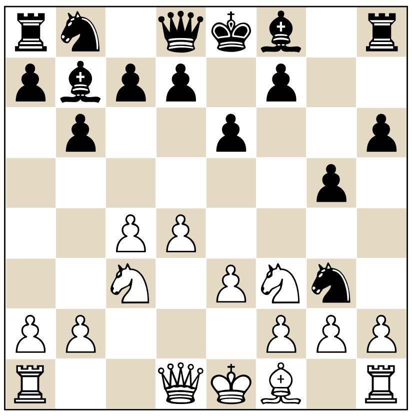
Fressinet-Aronian
Germany Bundesliga 2011
position after 14... ♘c5

15.♗xc5 dxc5! and although it took until move 30, Aronian eventually managed to re-establish a strong centre by transferring his knight to d6.

And here is another controversial capture, introduced by a well-known strategical non-conformist.

Oleg Romanishin
Zoltan Ribli
Riga 1979

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.c4 b6 4.♘c3 ♗b7 5.♗g5 h6 6.♗h4 g5 7.♗g3 ♘h5 8.e3 ♘xg3

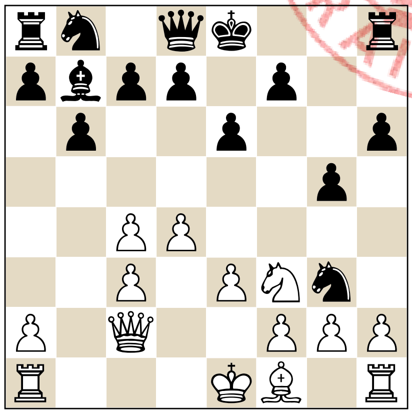


9.fxg3!? Judit Polgar (in *Game of Queens*) on this move after her win as Black against Kortchnoi in 2003: ‘A rare and strategically risky continuation. (...) The main move 9.hxg3 looks more logical to me. It respects the principle of capturing towards the centre, does not create any weaknesses and opens the h-file for the king's rook.’ And indeed, up to this point, most players had opted for that natural move. Both Romanishin and Kortchnoi were aware of the strategical risks, of course, but White had pinned his hopes on the pressure along the f-file after castling kingside. Speelman summed it up neatly: ‘Dynamic in that it opens the f-file, but spoiling the pawn structure.’ **9...♗g7 10.♗d3 d6** 10...♘c6 11.0-0 ♕e7 was Speelman-Stean a year later. At this point, Speelman admits: ‘Obviously I was already regretting my seduction by the Romanishin game – I've never been particularly comfortable with the responsibility engendered by a bad pawn structure at such an early stage’ (*Jon Speelman's Best Games*). Indeed, aside from the objective assessment of the fxg3 capture, individual style may influence the decision. Would you rather strive for quick and active piece play or would you attach more value to the long-term strategic features in your position? **11.0-0 ♘d7 12.♗c2 ♕e7 13.♕d3 a6?!** Ribli considers castling queenside, but opts for the wrong plan, leaving his king vulnerable in the middle and justifying White's set-up. **14.♘d2 c5 15.♘de4 f5 16.dxc5! ♘xc5** 16...fxe4 17.♘xe4, and the f1-rook is a useful participant in the attack. **17.♘xd6+ ♔f8 18.♘xf5 exf5 19.♕xf5+ ♔g8 20.♘d5 ♕e8 21.♖ad1 ♖c8 22.b4 ♘e6 23.♘xb6 ♖c7 24.c5 h5 25.♖d6 ♖h6 26.♖xe6 1-0**

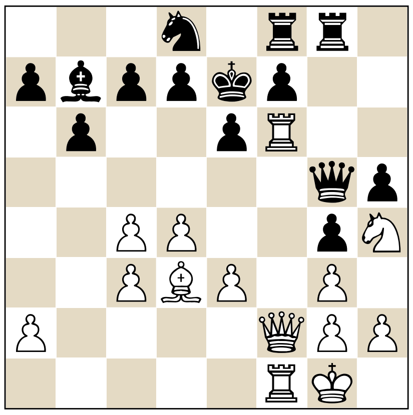
This was successful, but Romanishin's concept may not be the most terrifying threat to Black. It did not take long, though, before the same move became fashionable in a very similar position:

Jan Timman
Tony Miles
Brussels 1986

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 b6 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 ♗b7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 g5 8.♗g3 ♘e4 9.♕c2 ♗xc3+ 10.bxc3 ♘xg3



11.fxg3!? g4 11...d6 12.♗d3 ♘d7 13.0-0 ♕e7 14.♕f2 0-0-0 was another Timman-Miles game from Tilburg 1985. In his annotations, Miles expressed his doubts about the correctness of his 14th move, but it proved to be the safest outing for his king in this line. **12.♘h4 ♕g5 13.♕d2 ♘c6 14.♗d3 ♖g8** 14...f5 15.0-0 0-0 16.♖f4 ♖f6 17.♕e2 h5 18.e4 fxe4 19.♕xe4 ♖h6 20.♖af1 saw another successful occupation of the f-file in Beliavsky-Miles, Tunis 1985 – White soon won. In the game, Miles decided to leave his king in the centre, but he must have regretted his decision almost immediately: **15.0-0 ♔e7 16.♖f4 ♖af8 17.♖af1 h5 18.♕f2 ♘d8 19.♖f6**



Surely this diagram could serve to promote the more controversial recapture on g3. Timman wrapped up the game neatly. **19...♖e8 20.e4 d6 21.c5 bxc5 22.♗b5 ♖ef8 23.e5 cxd4 24.cxd4 c6 25.♗d3 dxe5 26.♘g6+ ♔d7 27.♘xf8+ ♖xf8 28.d5 exd5 29.♕c5 ♔e8 30.♖1f5 1-0**

So sit on your hands for a sec when you're about to execute an ‘automatic’ (re)capture. There might be another choice! ■

Sadler on Books

Way ahead of his time

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Alexander Alekhine's death, **MATTHEW SADLER** takes a look at some recent books on the fourth World Champion.

Looking around my house the other day, I began to wonder whether it is turning into a chess library. Between all the books I order and the constant stream of review copies that arrive at the door, there isn't a surface in my living room that isn't covered with chess books. Still, after a trip to the fantastic Max Euwe Centrum at the weekend in Amsterdam, I realised that there's a long way to go before I can claim to have an impressive collection!

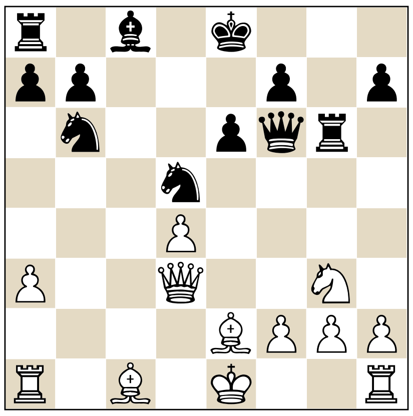
Stimulated by the 70th anniversary of Alekhine's death this year, I've been doing a lot of analysis work on Alekhine's games recently, and what puzzled me greatly was how relatively few books have been written about his games. In fact, there are more books about Alekhine's Defence than about the great man himself! The fantastic annotations in Alekhine's own books seem to have cast a shadow over subsequent efforts. For example, both Kotov's 2-volume Alekhine anthology and Panov's selection of 300 of Alekhine's games mainly quote Alekhine's analysis at critical moments.

I was hoping to find some books I'd missed at the Max Euwe Centrum but the only one I saw was the German version of *Alexander Alekhine Fourth World Champion* by the Russian chess historians Isaac and Vladimir Linder, now published in English by Russell Enterprises. This is the fourth in a planned series of 14 volumes dealing with the World Champions from Steinitz to Kramnik. The authors had already published a work in Russian in 2001 about these World Champions, entitled *Kings of the Chess World*. The basic content for these volumes has been taken from there, but the material has been corrected and expanded.

The first thing to understand about the book is that the focal point is not Alekhine's games. Karsten Müller provides brief annotations of 136 games, but this book is not the place to expect too many new insights. A couple of comments did catch my eye however. One of these was Müller's analysis of the 3rd match game from the Alekhine-Euwe 1935 World Championship Match:

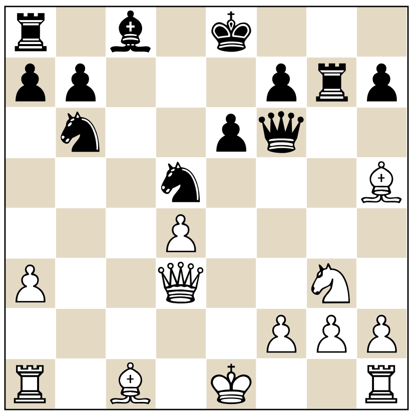
FR 8.3 – C15
Alexander Alekhine
Max Euwe
World Championship 1935 (3)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.a3 ♗xc3+ 5.bxc3 dxe4 6.♕g4 ♘f6 7.♕xg7 ♖g8 8.♕h6 c5 9.♘e2 ♘bd7 10.♘g3 ♖g6 11.♕e3 ♘d5 12.♕xe4 ♘xc3 13.♕d3 ♘d5 14.♗e2 ♕f6 15.c3 cxd4 16.cxd4 ♘7b6



Alekhine was very proud of his next sequence of moves, describing them in these terms in his *Best Games Collection*: 'This bishop manoeuvre, consisting of four consecutive moves, forces a practically decisive weakening of Black's pawn position. The following play on both wings is very instructive and, I believe, typical of my style.'

17.♗h5 ♖g7

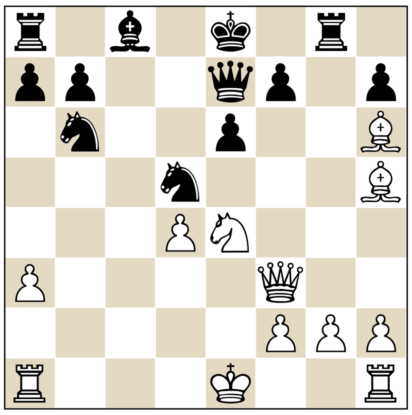


The game continued: **18.♗f3 ♕g6 19.♗e4 f5 20.♗f3 ♔f8 21.a4**

A very typical plan for Alekhine. A knight on b6/g3/g6/b3 automatically gets chased by a rook's pawn in his games! **21...♖c7 22.0-0 ♗d7 23.♗a3+ ♔g8 24.a5**

This whole manoeuvre is very nice, but Müller points out correctly that

18.♘e4 was even stronger: 18.♘e4 ♕e7 19.♗h6 ♖xg2 (19...♖g8 20.♕f3



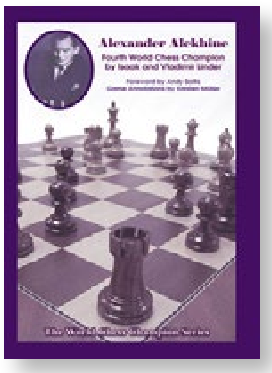
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

is the horrible point: Black cannot stop 21.♗xf7+ followed by 22.♘d6+ by normal means) 20.♗xf7+ wins.

However, the main focus of the book is Alekhine's life, and from that point of view the book is an absolute treat! The book is divided up into five chapters of which the first two – 'Life and Destiny' and 'Matches, Tournaments, Rivals' – are the meatiest. One word of warning: these chapters are ordered thematically rather than chronologically, which can be very confusing. I was wondering at some stage whether my evening glasses of wine had affected me, as after reaching the Alekhine-Euwe match of 1937, I suddenly seemed to be thrown back to the Kecskemet tournament of 1927. At the beginning of that section the authors state: 'After his match with Euwe...' and it took me a while to realise that they meant the Alekhine-Euwe 10-game match of December 1926 – January 1927 in Amsterdam!

(Just a slight digression: Alekhine had organised the match to prepare himself for his encounter with Capablanca and he won by the slimmest of margins – 5½-4½. The course of the match was very reminiscent of the 1935 match: Alekhine started well and could have won all three games (he made 2½-½). However, Euwe reeled him in by wearing him down with maximum resistance and then striking with the occasional powerful game as in Game 8. In 1926, however, Alekhine managed to win the match on the Black side of a Dutch(!) in the 10th game.)

Alexander Alekhine
Fourth World
Champion
by Isaac & Vladimir
Linder
Russell Enterprises,
2016
★★★★☆

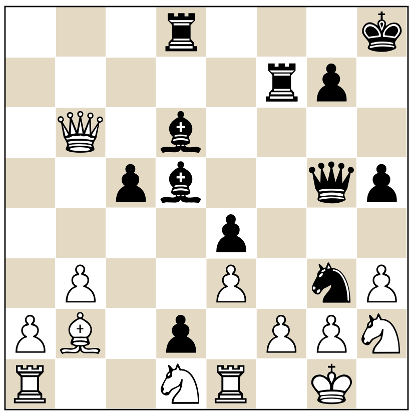


I think the material could be organised better, but once you get past that gripe there is much to enjoy. A really nice feature of the book are the mini-biographies of players that Alekhine played during his career. Where else could you learn about Boris Verlinsky, an Odessa player who drew a two-game match with Alekhine in 1916, but lost a longer return match in 1918 by 6-0? Or Benjamin Blumenfeld, who was one of Alekhine's first teachers and thought up the Blumenfeld Gambit (1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.d5 b5), which Alekhine used to such good effect against Tarrasch in 1922:

'The main focus of the book is Alekhine's life, and from that point of view the book is an absolute treat!'

BI 3.8 – E10
Siegbert Tarrasch
Alexander Alekhine
Bad Pistyan 1922

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5 4.d5 b5 5.dxe6 fxe6 6.cxb5 d5 7.e3 ♗d6 8.♘c3 0-0 9.♗e2 ♗b7 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.♗b2 ♕e7 12.0-0 ♖ad8 13.♕c2 e5 14.♖fe1 e4 15.♘d2 ♘e5 16.♘d1 ♘fg4 17.♗xg4 ♘xg4 18.♘f1 ♕g5 19.h3 ♘h6 20.♔h1 ♘f5 21.♘h2 d4 22.♗c1 d3 23.♕c4+ ♔h8 24.♗b2 ♘g3+ 25.♔g1 ♗d5 26.♕a4 ♘e2+ 27.♔h1 ♖f7 28.♕a6 h5 29.b6 ♘g3+ 30.♔g1 axb6 31.♕xb6 d2



You have the feeling that White didn't get much done in the last 13 moves!
32.♖f1 ♘xf1 33.♘xf1 ♗e6 34.♔h1 ♗xh3 35.gxh3 ♖f3 36.♘g3 h4 37.♗f6 ♕xf6 38.♘xe4 ♖xh3+ 0-1.

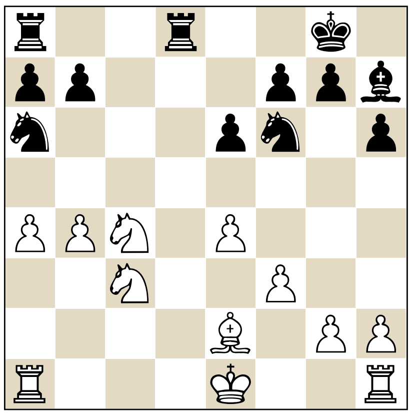
* * *

Alekhine move by move by Steve Giddins (Everyman Chess) is the latest in Everyman's Move by Move series, which aims to present material – whether an opening or games by great players – in a reasonably simple manner, taking the reader through each game in a Q&A format. As my major supplier at work always says normally before he drops an enormous bombshell: 'full disclosure'! Steve was my first coach so I've known him for many years, so you'll have to bear that in mind when you assess this review.

This book presents 35 games of Alekhine – 12 Black games and 23 White games – between 1909 and 1943. It's quite a challenge selecting a small number of Alekhine's games, as he produced so many publishable (and thus well-known) games in the course of his career. Giddins takes the approach of avoiding the very best known games (such as Alekhine's six wins against Capablanca during the 1927 World Championship Match) and includes a number of less famous wins (for example, I hadn't seen Alekhine's wins against Opocensky,

Stoltz and Kieninger before). The goal of the book is to emphasize the instructional nature of Alekhine's play, without getting too lost in unfathomable complexities, and I think that it succeeds very well in that goal.

Let me give you an example from Game 5 of Alekhine's 1929 World Championship match against Bogoljubow. Incidentally, this is a very good example of Alekhine's ability to react well to a loss. After a very nervy defeat in the fourth game (which allowed Bogoljubow to level the match) Alekhine produced a beautifully controlled queenless middlegame win in the fifth game which made its way right into his Best Games collection!



Alekhine-Bogoljubow
World Championship 1929 (5)
position after 16...♖fxd8

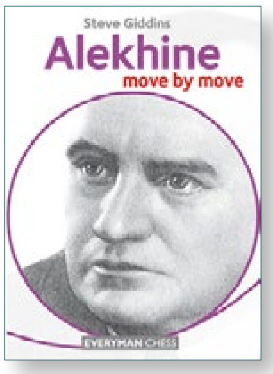
17.♘a2

'*Question:* That looks rather a clumsy move!

Answer: Yes, but it is an effective one. The point is that 17.b5?! lets the enemy knight become active after 17...♘c5, while 17.♖b1 runs into the tactical blow 17...♘d5, when 18.exd5?! ♗xb1 19.♘xb1 exd5 followed by ...♘xb4, gives Black rook and two pawns for two minor pieces and he has rid himself of the problem bishop on h7. Alekhine's move maintains his grip.

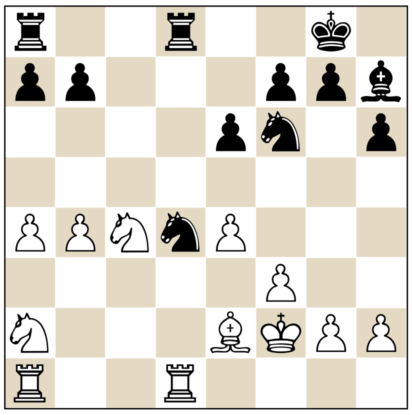
Question: Fritz doesn't seem to think White really has anything here.

Answer: Yes, I noticed that, but I do not believe its assessment. It is another case where the nature of White's advantage, namely the dead h7-bishop, is rather too long-term for the computer to appreciate. There are no immediate threats and Black has plenty of reasonable solid-looking moves, but he has no way to solve the essential problem of that bishop, which will eventually start to tell.'



Alekhine move by move
by Steve Giddins
Everyman Chess, 2016
★★★★☆

17...♘b8 18.♔f2 ♘c6 19.♖hd1 ♘d4



'*Question:* Black appears to have made some progress over the past few moves – he has recycled his knight from a6 to a powerful square on d4.

Answer: True, but the improvement in his position is merely cosmetic. The basic underlying problem of the h7-bishop is still there, and White will just organize his pieces and begin exerting pressure on the queenside, at which point his effective extra piece will be felt.'

20.♖ac1 ♔f8

'*Question:* Is this just a case of centralising his king for the endgame?

Answer: Partly, though as Alekhine points out, it is also the start of a plan to dig the bishop out of mothballs. Black hopes to be able to play ...♗g8, move the f6-knight somewhere, then ...f7-f6 and ...e6-e5, allowing the bishop to see the light of day again.

Question: Seems rather long-winded.

Answer: Quite right. That is the problem; he will not get the time to implement the plan.'

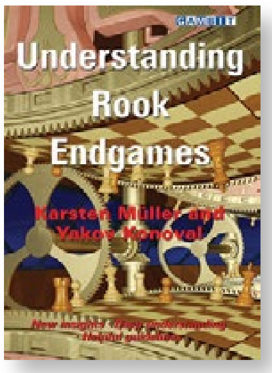
The Question and Answer format works extremely well in this case, as the author anticipates questions that a club player could justifiably ask about the course of the game ('Isn't White going backwards with 17.♘a2?', 'Hasn't Black got out of difficulties after 19...♘d4?', 'Why does my computer say the position is equal?') and answers them in a clear, simple manner. I would recommend this book especially for players – young and old – who are looking for a first introduction to Alekhine's games and a not overly challenging way to get into the way Alekhine played.

Thinking about it, you would actually want to recommend an 'Alekhine pack' for players who want to get the whole picture about Alekhine. That would probably be composed of the Lindners book for Alekhine's life story, this book as an introduction to Alekhine's games and then Alekhine's own Game Collections to demonstrate Alekhine's own skill (way ahead of his time) as an analyst and annotator!

■ ■ ■

Now we get serious with *Understanding Rook Endgames* by Karsten Müller and Yakov Konoval. It's almost 300 pages but it's also one of those books where you know that most of the work involved will never make it into book form! That work has been to extend tablebases to 7-man endgames and to create tools to be able to extract useful positions from the terabytes of information produced. After that there is still a human effort involved to classify, understand and present the information! In the context of rook endgames, 7-man tablebases means that ♔+♖+♙+♙ vs. ♚+♜+♟ endings can be considered to be 'solved'.

In some ways, I think that the title of the book doesn't really cover

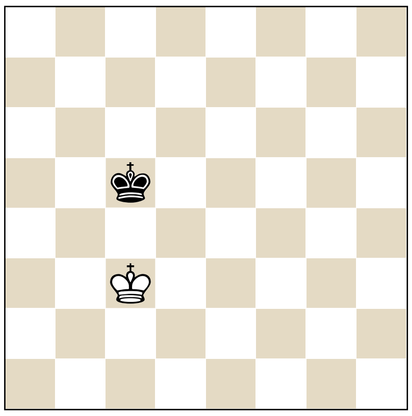


Understanding Rook Endgames by Karsten Müller and Yakov Konoval
Gambit, 2016
★★★★☆

the content or the way the information is presented. Reading through the material, I didn't feel confident that I had extracted any general rules for playing various types of ♖+♙+♙ vs ♖+♙ endings. The number of examples is so large (probably around 1,000) that at some stage my eyes started to glaze over at the rooks and pawns in various subtly different configurations. However, I think that the point of the book is slightly different. I am absolutely certain that if ever you want to study such endings, or if ever you get such a material configuration in one of your games, then this book will be the first one you reach for. The range and quality of the examples is so high, you can feel confident that anything you study and learn on the basis of Müller's book is 100% correct. That's a reassuring thought for any amateur who has a limited amount of time to dedicate to chess study!

■ ■ ■

The last book to review is *Attacking Chess for Club Players* by Herman Grooten (New In Chess). Judging from the title, it shouldn't really be for me, but I've enjoyed it enormously. The standard way of teaching tactical motifs is to set a long series of tactical exercises and hope that repetition leads to the absorption by the student of the required patterns and skills. I've done a fair amount of that too in the past, but I've always wondered whether it was the most effective way. This book presents the material in a relaxed, easy to read way with surprising examples and little stories that keep you awake and interested throughout. For example, I really liked the little exercises of this type, of which there are many throughout the book:



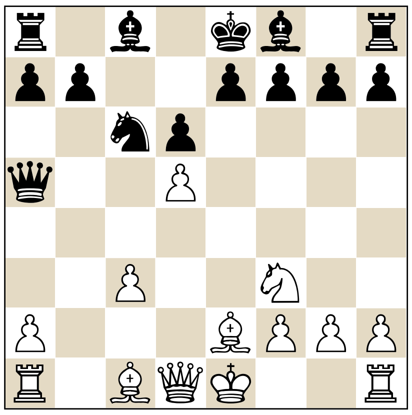
'Place a white queen and knight on the board in such a way that Black is mated. Try and find as many mates as possible'

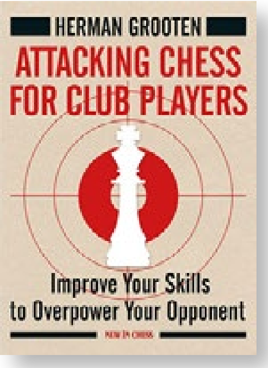
Creating the mate like that really makes you think about the way your pieces work together, which was precisely the goal of the chapter ('Cooperation between the pieces')!

The final delight for me was seeing a photo of a very young Julian Hodgson in the chapter 'Attacking games by ace players' and Julian's game against Suba from the Blackpool zonal in 1990. I hope that Grooten's book inspires young and old players to take a look at his games: on his day, there wasn't a better attacker than him!

SI 46.15 -B50
Julian Hodgson
Mihai Suba
Blackpool 1990

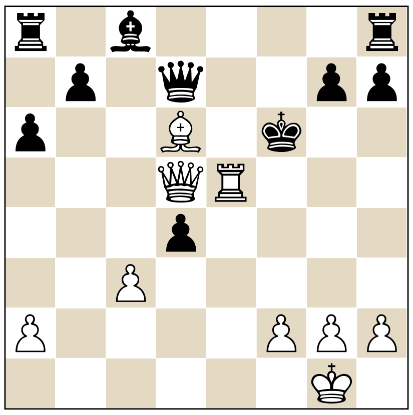
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.♗e2 ♘c6 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 ♘xe4 7.d5 ♕a5+ 8.♘c3 ♘xc3 9.bxc3



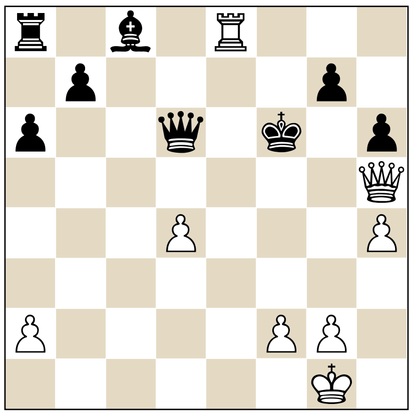


Attacking Chess for Club Players by Herman Grooten
New In Chess, 2016
★★★★★

9...♘d8 10.0-0 e5 11.dxe6 ♘xe6 12.♘d4 ♗e7 13.♗b5+ ♔f8 14.♖b1 a6 15.♗c4 ♕c7 16.♗xe6 fxe6 17.♖e1 e5 18.♕f3+ ♗f6 19.♗a3 exd4 20.♕d5 ♗e7 21.♖xe7 ♔xe7 22.♖e1+ ♔f6 23.♗xd6 ♕d7 24.♖e5



24...♖e8 25.♕f3+ ♔g6 26.♕h5+ ♔f6 27.♕f3+ ♔g6 28.♕h5+ ♔f6 29.♖xe8 ♕xd6 30.cxd4 h6 31.h4



31...a5 32.♕f3+ ♔g6 33.h5+ ♔g5 34.♖e5+ ♕xe5 35.dxe5 ♗e6 36.♕xb7 ♖g8 37.♕e7+ ♔f5 38.g4+ ♔xe5 39.f4+ ♔xf4 40.♕xe6 ♖d8 41.♕f7+ 1-0.

Classic stuff! So how many stars? Well the sun is shining outside and all is right with the world so let's make it 5! ■

Parimarjan's Chess Gym

Gimme the Knight

The common view is that bishops are slightly stronger than knights, but **PARIMARJAN NEGI** shows that there are situations in which Harry the Horse laughs at Barry the Bishop.

Given how different knights and bishops are, it is surprising that they are both approximately equal in strength. I guess this has something to do with the fact that neither of them can mate a lone king.

Conventionally, the bishops are considered to be slightly better than the knights. I have even heard the proposal that they should really be worth 3.5 points to the knight's 3. This is perhaps because the value of a bishop often increases as other pieces are exchanged and the game opens up.

But the knight has its uses as well. It can jump around and cause immediate trouble – and it is particularly effective in attacking situations. Also, if it manages to find a nice 'outpost', it can become incredibly annoying for your opponent to deal with.

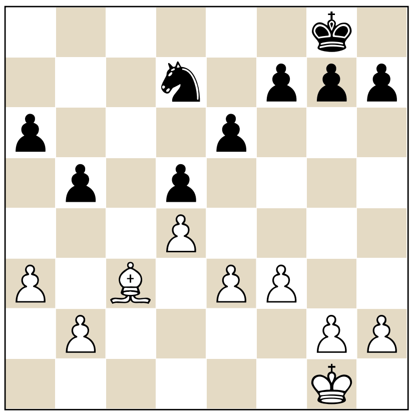
I personally like the bishops better. It is perfectly reasonable to have a preference for one or the other, but you should still know how to use both of them well.

Here I will deal with situations in which the knight works better, and I want to focus on the cases of a single bishop versus a single knight, as the dynamics change considerably when both sides have a pair of minor pieces. But there are many common ideas even in the situations with single pieces, so it is useful to start studying from here.

The first instance is obviously when the bishop is really bad – for instance shut in behind its pawns – and the knight has a perfect outpost. This is the most common type of good knight vs bad bishop. Such a bishop is basically just a glorified pawn – and as long as the knight player is careful, he can easily dominate it. As this is a little too obvious, I will not deal with it. It is more useful to see more nuanced and subtler ways in which the knight can be better.

Closed Positions

The bishops are long-range pieces and obviously prefer open positions. In closed positions, their strength is much less obvious. Meanwhile, the knight can often manoeuvre around effectively. If the knight doesn't have an obvious outpost, however, the situation is not so clear.



Lenderman-Sadvakasov
Foxwoods Open 2009
position after 27.♗xc3

The position is quite equal. Neither the knight nor the bishop looks particularly good. But as we will see, the knight's manoeuvring isn't really restricted because of the closed structure. The bishop, meanwhile, really doesn't have anything to do.

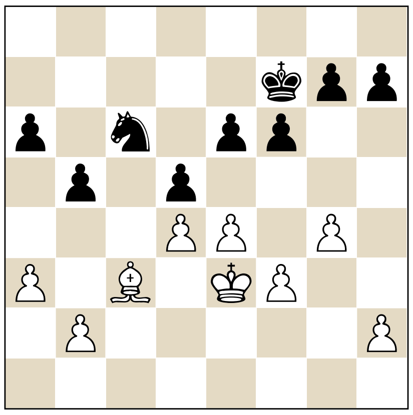
27...♘b8

Black has all the time in the world, so he happily goes about improving his position.

28.♔f2 ♘c6 29.e4

The centre looks nice, but it doesn't help White improve his bishop at all. And now ♘c6 seems even better placed, because it is targeting d4, so to my mind White shouldn't have played it at all. Sadvakasov sees that the best White can do is to play exd5 at some point – the d4-pawn will still remain weak then, so e5 will be prevented.

29...f6 30.♔e3 ♔f7 31.g4



31...♔g6!?

Creating ideas on the kingside. There are no immediate threats, but the key in such situations is to not be in a hurry. White's bishop is definitely worse, so it is harder for him to just wait around because he would like to try and improve his position.

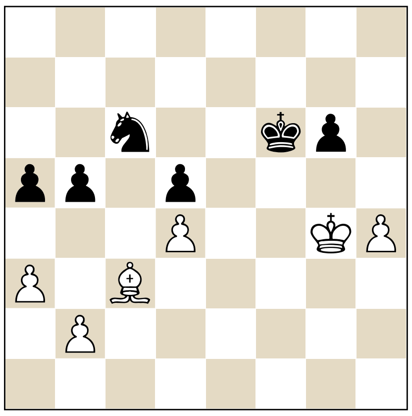
32.h4 h5 33.exd5 exd5

Now we have a typical classic structure. The knight is clearly the better piece, but the position is probably still close to equal, because it is very hard to improve for either side.

34.♔f4 hxg4 35.fxg4 ♔f7 36.g5 g6

Preventing h5 and h6, which would have led to immediate simplifications. One of the most important things in such drawish but slightly better positions is to give your opponent chances to go wrong. Preventing any easy way to simplify the position increases the pressure on White, of course.

37.gxf6 ♔xf6 38.♔g4 a5



39.♗e1

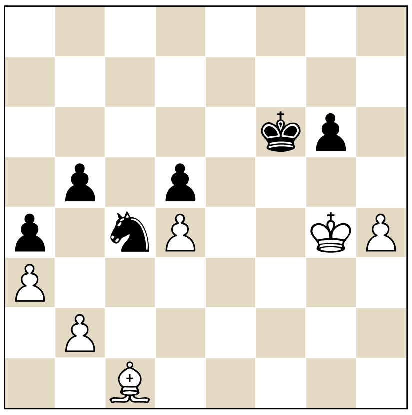
39.b3!, preventing ...a4, was the best defence, I think. He may have been worried that he will lose a pawn after 39...b4 40.axb4 axb4 41.♗d2 (41.♗b2 ♘a5 loses the pawn) 41...♘xd4 42.♗xb4 ♘xb3, but the simplifications have clearly been in White's favour and he can easily draw here, because the kingside can be simplified with a timely h5: 43.♗c3+, and this should end in a draw.

39...a4!

Fixing the queenside pawns, because White has the dark-squared bishop. Now all the white pawns are on dark squares – which makes White's bishop worse. It is hard to see any easy way to improve Black's position, but in the next few moves Black shows that he doesn't have to be in a hurry. And he lets you see the full power of knight manoeuvres. Most of the manoeuvring doesn't accomplish anything – but since White cannot improve his position, this stuff will wear him out.

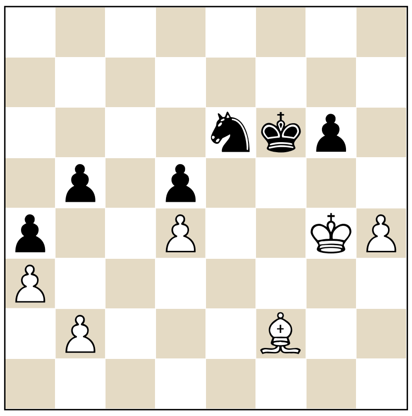
40.♔f4 ♘d8 41.♔g4 ♘f7 42.♗d2 ♘d6 43.♗e3 ♘c4 44.♗c1

> 'One of the most important things in such drawish but slightly better positions is to give your opponent chances to go wrong.'



Now Black sees that he isn't accomplishing much on c4, so he is going to try even wackier ways. The next series of moves doesn't need any comment, since Black is basically just testing the limits of the position and wearing White out.

44...♘a5 45.♗d2 ♘b3 46.♗e3 ♘a1 47.♗d2 ♘c2 48.♔f4 ♔e6 49.♗c3 ♘a1 50.♗d2 ♘b3 51.♗e3 ♘a5 52.♗d2 ♘c4 53.♗c1 ♘d6 54.♗e3 ♔f7 55.♗d2 ♔f6 56.♗e3 ♘f5 57.♗f2 ♘g7 58.♔g4 ♘e6



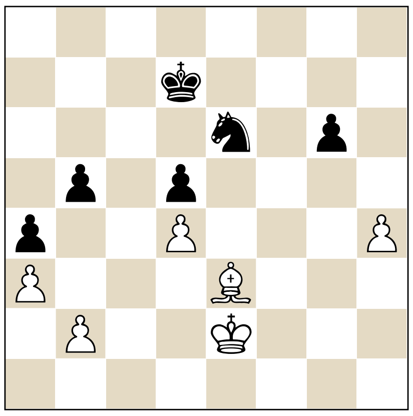
Eventually he settles on e6, and now he wants to bring his king into play. The e6-knight keeps the kingside perfectly under control and also attacks the d4-pawn.

59.♗e3 ♔e7!? A change of plan.

60.♔f3 ♔d7 61.♔e2

Here Sadvakasov realizes that he can't play ...b4, so he comes up with a very ingenious plan:

61...♔e7 62.♔f3 ♔d6!? 63.♔e2 ♔d7



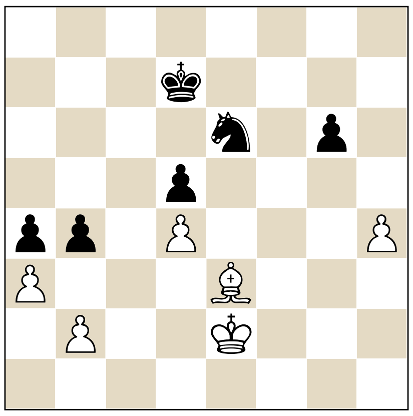
Is it zugzwang? Not quite, but White will have to make a concession!

64.♔f3

64.♔d3 would probably have kept the b4 idea intact. But now maybe Black would try to go to f5: 64...♔e7 65.♔e2 ♔f6 66.♔f3 ♔f5, which looks quite dangerous for White, although things are far from clear, of course.

64.♗f2 seems like the best move to me – ...♘f4 isn't really dangerous. But this isn't always obvious during a game when the defending side starts seeing ghosts. Here, White really wanted to keep the bishop on e3 to restrict the knight, so he made a small concession on the queenside.

64...b4! 65.♔e2



65...b3!

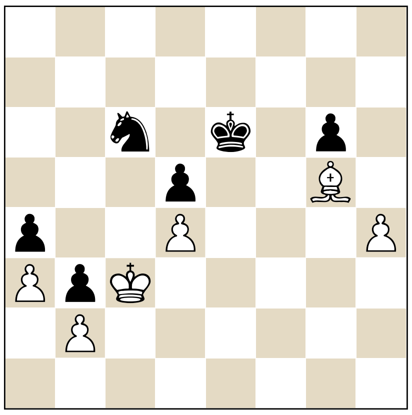
It doesn't look such a big thing, but now Black starts having threats on the

queenside as well – White is basically lost now! If White keeps the king on g4, Black will be able to take the knight to b5 –, and how do you think will the white bishop defend against ♘xa3 and ♘xd4 at the same time?

66.♔d3 ♘d8!

The knight is perfect on c6 to prevent the white king from getting to b4. Once again we see the flexibility of the knight come in handy.

67.♗g5 ♘c6 68.♔c3 ♔e6



The king is bound to penetrate, so it's basically over. The b3-pawn is still crucial.

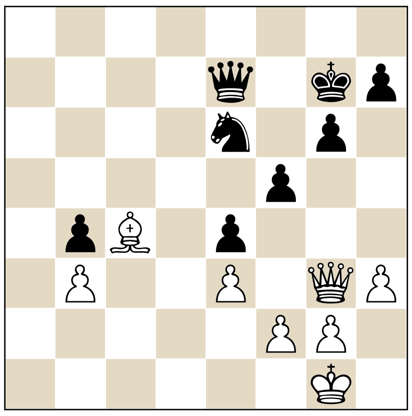
69.♗h6 ♔f5 70.♗g7 ♔e4 71.♗f6 ♔e3 72.♗g7 ♔e2 73.♗h6 ♘e7 74.♔b4 74.♗g5 ♘f5 75.♗f6 ♘e3 and ♘d1 next should win. **74...♔d3 75.♗g5 ♔c2 76.♗xe7 ♔xb2**

White resigned.

One of the crucial lessons from this game is how Sadvakasov manipulated the changing structure to ensure that his knight remained the better piece. Another thing worth noting is the way he fixed all White's pawns on the dark squares. This is a typical strategy when fighting against a bishop – although you see it more often in a bishop vs bishop ending.

Knight + Queen

This seems to be surprisingly little known, but knights are amazing in combination with the queen! I guess this is because the queen creates more tactical chances – and the knights are great in such situations. In any case, this is something best learnt by example:

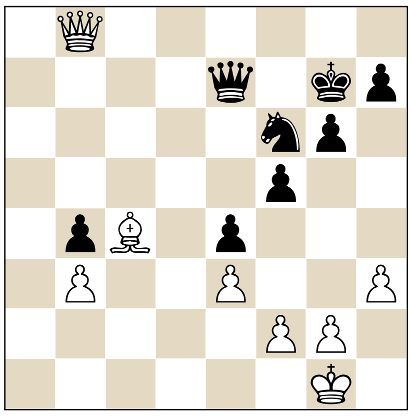


Belikov-Bocharov
Russia Cup 2007
position after 44.axb3

White seems to be doing well here. The white bishop is better than the knight for now, and the black king looks a little weak too... The computer thinks White is doing just fine. But practically speaking, it is all very different. Bocharov was definitely thinking about winning here, and the first thing he does is find a nice square for his knight where the bishop can't disturb it. And Black has the great ♕+♘ combo.

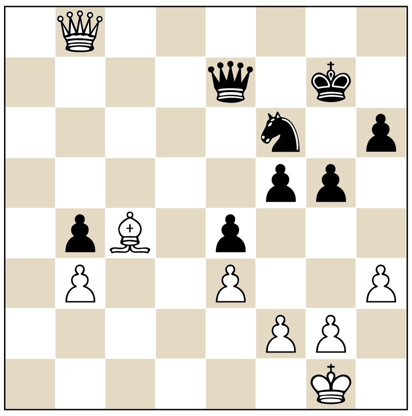
44...♘c7 The biggest advantage of the knight, of course, is its flexibility and the manoeuvring that comes with it.

45.♕f4 ♘e8 46.♕b8 ♘f6



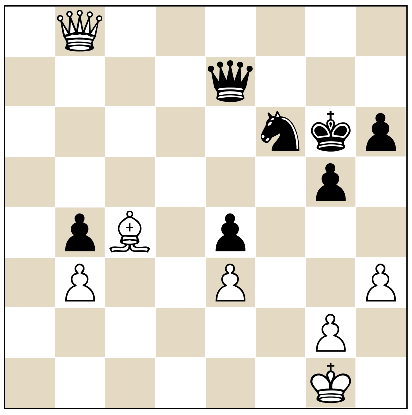
This is the perfect square for the knight because it prevents the one threat that White's bishop had – with ♕g8+, etc. Also, this shows another great way to fight against the bishop. If you can just remove everything from the bishop's diagonal, then it can basically be made useless. Of course, you should also have some other plans, and here Black has the perfect plan to use his extra space to start expanding on the kingside.

47.♔f1 g5 48.♔g1 h6



49.♕c8? 49.g3, and White would be doing just fine. I guess Bocharov had a plan like ...h5, ...h4, continuing to create structural problems around the white king. The computer thinks White is better here, but again, practically speaking, things feel very different. The ♕+♘ combo can become really strong.

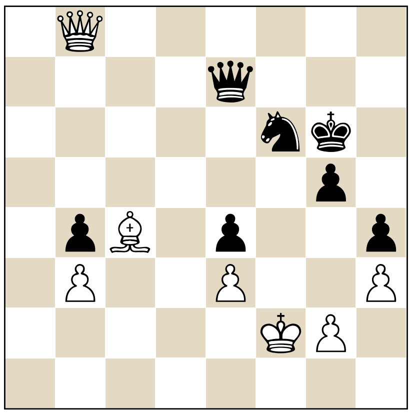
49...f4 50.♕b8 fxe3 51.fxe3 ♔g6



The change in structure has slightly weakened the white king. Another key thing to note – the knight is still perfectly placed on f6, because it defends against any threats to the black king, while also potentially helping to expand the kingside.

52.♔f2 h5 53.♔e2 h4 Fixing the structure – this may be useful at some point.

54.♔f2



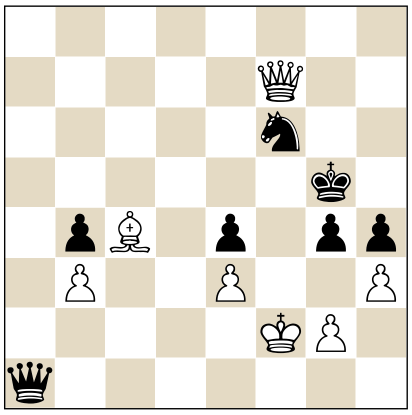
54...♕c5!

Amazing how Black is simply prepared to leave his king and knight to deal with the white queen and bishop! This is a perfect example of how great a defender the knight is – can you think of any easy way to attack the black king around the f6-knight? Even if you could get your queen to f7, and it is a big if, Black will just play ...♔f5, and I don't see any way for White to mate Black! Note: one of the main reasons why it is so hard to attack the black king is that White can't attack the f6-knight with the light-squared bishop. That's why it is such a great defender in this position.

55.♔e2 ♕a5 56.♕f8 ♕a2+ 57.♔f1 ♕b1+ 58.♔f2 ♕b2+ 59.♔g1 ♕a1+ 60.♔f2 g4!

Continuing to create threats. And amazingly enough, despite the many checks and the lone black king, White doesn't even have a perpetual! Of course, White isn't losing either, but he needs to make some tough decisions, and there aren't any easy decisions with threats like ...g3+ hanging in the air...

61.♕f7+ ♔g5

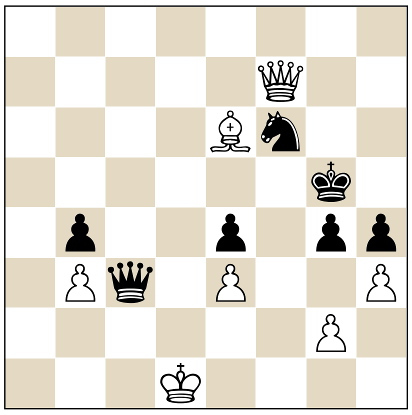


62.♗e6??

And finally, the pressure has become too much for White and he cracks. It isn't immediately clear why this is bad – at first nothing seems to have changed, but White has given up the key d3-square.

62.♔e2 keeps everything intact, and apparently Black has no ways to improve despite all the checks. This is not an easy thing to realize! Still, it's not a draw yet and White will have to fight for it: 62...g3 63.♕g7+ ♔f5 64.♕e7!, threatening 65.♗e6+ – which would actually be winning for White if the black queen left the f6-knight undefended. So Black can't go after the g2-pawn, etc. But note that if Black just ignores White, White still doesn't have any way to mate the black king! 64...♕b2+ 65.♔d1, and this should be a draw.

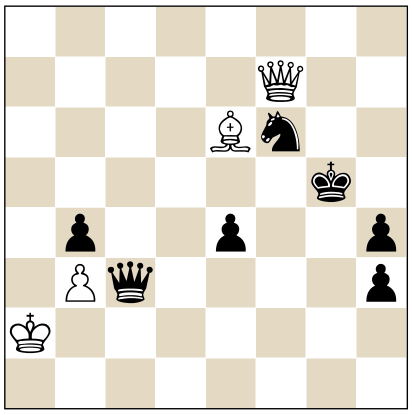
62...♕b2+ 63.♔e1 ♕c3+ 64.♔d1



64...♕d3+!

The key move. Now White's pawns will fall one after another.

65.♔c1 ♕xe3+ 66.♔b1 ♕g1+ 67.♔a2 ♕xg2+ 68.♔b1 ♕f1+ 69.♔a2 ♕e2+ 70.♔b1 ♕d3+ 71.♔a2 ♕c2+ 72.♔a1 ♕c3+ 73.♔a2 gxh3



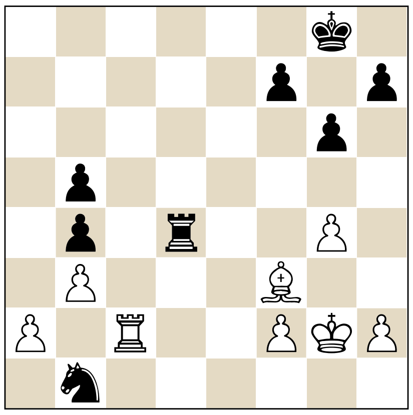
And obviously the black king is still very safe. They still played another 10 moves or so, but the result is obvious.

Admittedly, we did not get to see a lot of knight + queen co-ordination in this game. But 46...♘f6 served many purposes – and it was crucial in that Black was able to advance on the kingside. I chose this game, because there were a lot of other lessons packed into it as well. For instance, did you notice that despite the c4-bishop looking so pretty, it was barely doing anything useful at all? This is a typical strategy to fight against a single bishop – just arrange your pieces on the opposite-coloured squares, and the bishop can quickly become useless.

The Outpost

In simpler open endgames without queens, the knights are naturally less effective. Here the biggest problem is that the knight often doesn't have a comfortable square, while the bishop can aim at targets from afar. But if you can find a nice 'outpost' for your knight in the enemy camp – typically on a square of the opposite colour to the bishop – the knight would become untouchable. In contrast, a bishop can almost never find such impregnable outposts, because the opposing knight can manoeuvre around to kick it out.

Such 'untouchable' pieces can be really annoying, because they make the life of all other pieces hard as well. In the following game, I was struggling to equalize for a long time, but after some sudden simplifications, my opponent underestimated the power of my knight.



Melkumyan-Negi
Politiken Cup 2013
position after 34... ♖d4

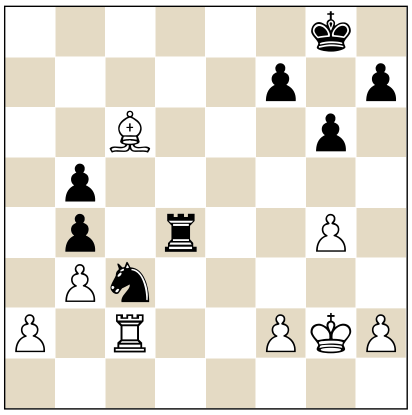
The position looks quite close to equal, but you can immediately see that Black has the excellent c3-square for the knight. This is not such a safe outpost for now, because White has ideas like a3. Also, the white bishop doesn't look too bad. But note: just as in Belikov–Bocharov above, it doesn't really have

many targets. Basically, it is just an empty bishop.

35.♗c6

An interesting pawn sacrifice idea. After 35...♖xg4+ White's king develops very fast and White will get a fairly active position. Taking the pawn was possible, but as we were approaching 40 moves, it looked as if this might get messy. So I stuck with keeping control with my knight...

35...♘c3



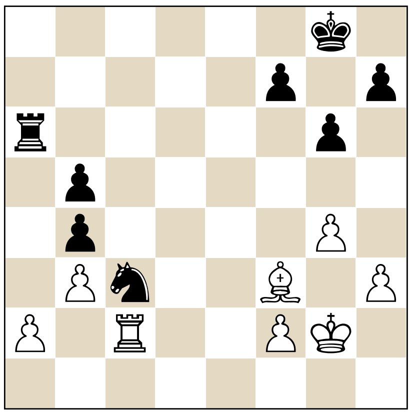
36.h3?

The computer doesn't think this changes much, but now I can prevent a3 altogether with my next move.

36.♗f3, planning a3, would be a better idea, but that wasn't easy to admit, since he had just played ♗c6.

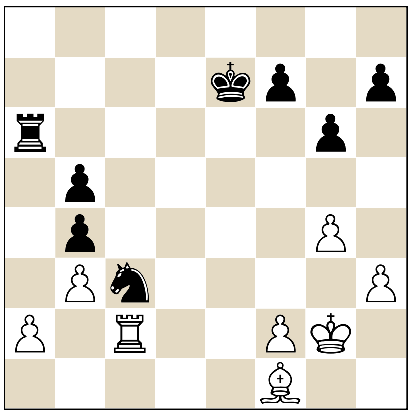
36.a3 was perhaps a better move as well, as the position remains more fluid and the black knight doesn't have a permanent home on c3.

36...♖d6! 37.♗f3 ♖a6!



Even though White can defend the a2-pawn by attacking b5, the key here is that I have fixed the c3-square for my knight. It might not be creating any immediate threats, but it is a huge psychological burden on White.

38.♗e2 ♔f8 Just improving the position. Life is easy with such a good knight! **39.♗f1 ♔e7**



40.♔f3

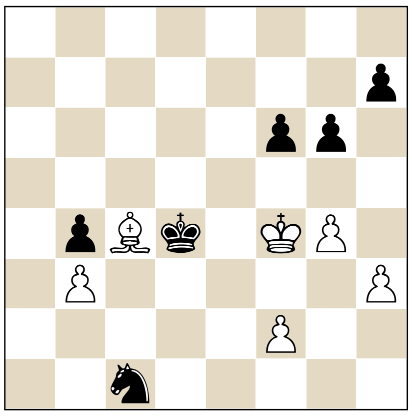
40.♖d2!, preventing the king from coming, to the queenside was essential: 40...♖d6 41.♖c2!, threatening a3.

40...♔d6 41.♔f4 ♔c5 It's amazing that White has played logical moves and yet his position is on the verge of collapse because the a2-pawn can't be defended – all because the c3-knight is untouchable.

42.♗d3 ♔d4 43.♖d2 ♖xa2 44.♖xa2 ♘xa2 45.♗xb5

Even thought the material is equal, the active black king and weak b3-pawn prove crucial.

45...♘c1 46.♗c4 f6 It is more important to prevent any counterplay on the kingside. I can come back and collect the b3-pawn any time.



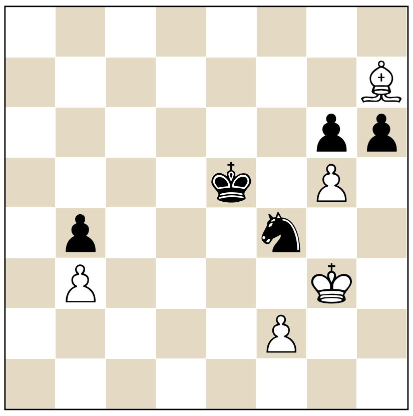
47.g5?

The tension proves too much for White and he gives up a pawn immediately.

47...♘d3+ 48.♔g3 fxg5 49.♗g8 h6 50.♗h7 ♘f4 51.h4

There was still one last crucial decision to make. If White gets in hxg5, ...hxg5, he will have easy counterplay with ♔g4, and I can't move the f4-knight without giving him play with ♗xg6.

51...♔e5! 52.hxg5



52...h5! Now the knight is perfect and we have restricted White's counterplay. I can comfortably collect the g5-pawn. **53.♗g8 ♔f5** And it was all over soon.

Conclusion

You might like a knight or a bishop better, but in a game you should still try to understand which piece is best for the situation. A few typical situations in which the knight can be great are:

■ When the bishop is bad – obviously! It can be less obvious if the position is closed, and neither the knight nor the bishop is particularly good. But the knight might still have a bit more room to manoeuvre.

■ Knight outposts are always nice – both in the middlegame and in the endgame. If they are on a different colour square from the bishop – even better.

■ Queen + knight is the ultimate combination! They can create many tactical threats, and they seem to complement each other very well, even in situations without an immediate attack.

■ The knight can be a great defender. It can sit right next to the king and cover many crucial weak squares, making life harder for the attacking side. ■

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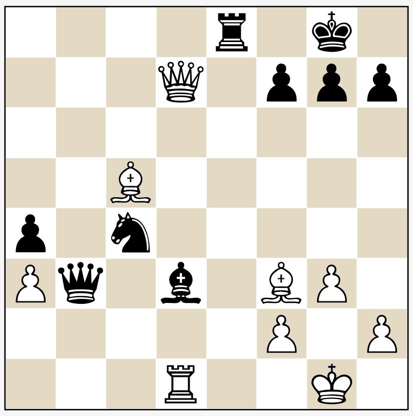
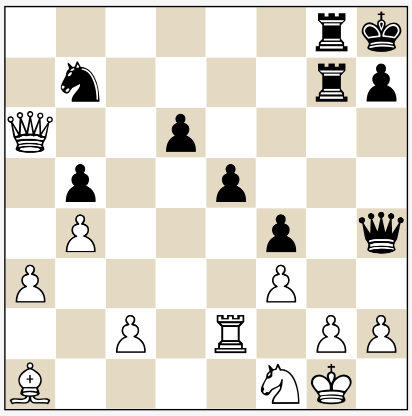
Solutions on page 105



1. Black to move



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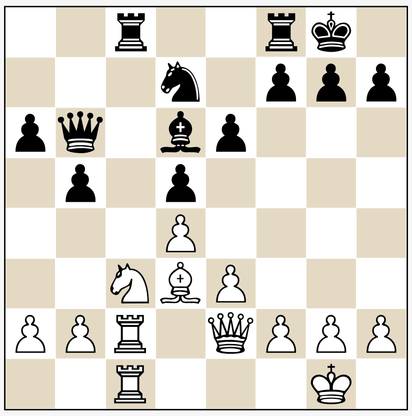
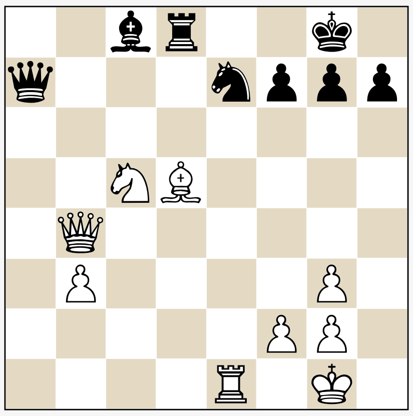
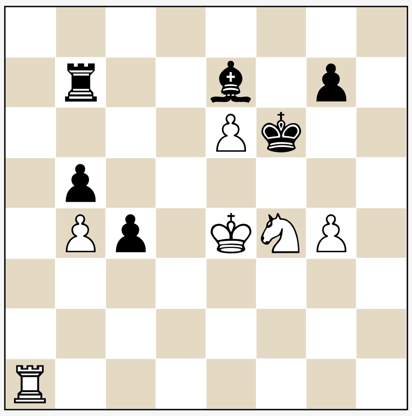


3. White to move



4. White to move



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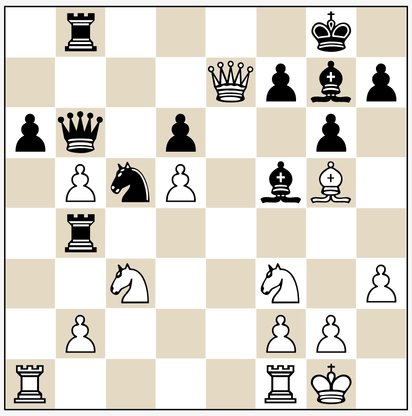
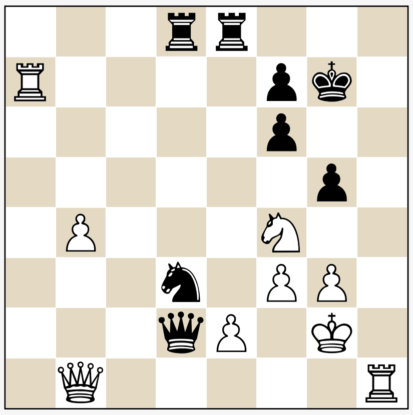
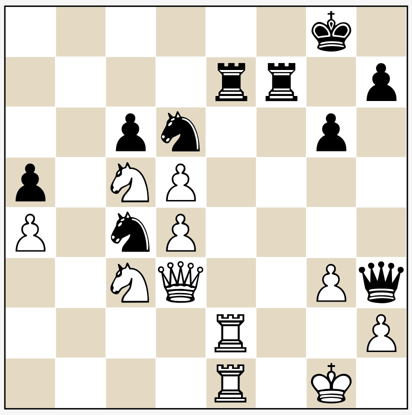


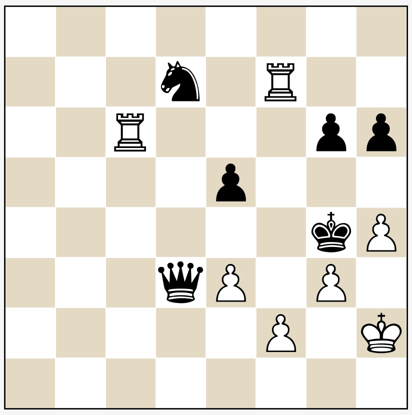
6. Black to move



7. White to move



8. Black to move



9. White to move

Hans Ree

Three giants in a small café

In June 1940, at the start of World War II, in the small seaside town of Arcachon near Bordeaux, Alexander Alekhine and the great artists Marcel Duchamp and Samuel Beckett found themselves together at the Café Aux Sports. **HANS REE** tried to find their traces.

It was a remarkable group of chess-playing artists that, for a few months in 1940, came together in Arcachon. Salvador Dali and his wife Gala, Marcel Duchamp and his wealthy American companion Mary Reynolds, Duchamp's sister Suzanne with her husband the painter Jean Crotti, and the Irish writer Samuel Beckett – a good friend of Mary Reynolds' – with Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil, his future wife. Duchamp, Beckett and Crotti were fanatical chess players. The Dalis also played chess, Gala more often than Salvador, it seems. The versatile surrealist artist Leonor Fini and the writer André-Pieyre de Mandiargues were also in Arcachon, but I don't know if they played chess.

Duchamp and Mary Reynolds had travelled to Arcachon in May 1940, when the Netherlands had surrendered to Germany after a war that lasted for only five days. France, which at the outbreak of the war had been considered a great military force, lasted for five weeks. Soon after the fall of the Netherlands and, later, Belgium, France was swamped by hundreds of thousands of refugees, many of them aiming for Bordeaux. The French government and parliament would also settle there briefly. People were trying to get away from Paris, while Bordeaux was in the South, only about 300 kilometres from the border with neutral Spain.

Many years later, a panel of prestigious critics would declare Duchamp to be the most influential artist of the 20th century. Beckett, a shy man who valued his privacy above all, received the Nobel Prize in 1969, to his great distress. And Dali would become the Divine Dali.

Hare, duck, oysters and wine

The Dalis had been the first to arrive in Arcachon. They had seen the war coming. As Dali later wrote in *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali*, 'Back in Paris I examined the map of France, I studied my winter campaign, trying to plan it in such a way as to combine the possibility of a Nazi invasion with gastronomical possibilities.' And: 'I finally put my finger as close as possible to the Spanish frontier and at the same time on a neuralgic point of French cooking: Bordeaux. That would be one of the last places the Germans reached if, as seemed to me highly improbable, they should win. Moreover, Bordeaux naturally meant Bordeaux wine, jugged hare, duck liver *aux raisins*, duck *aux oranges*. Arcachon Clair Oysters...'

Oh! What a lovely war, with wine, hare, duck and oysters. One would almost envy the Dalis, on the run from the Germans.

Arcachon in peacetime has been called a paradise. The Bassin d'Arcachon is a big bay (155 square kilometres) on the French Atlantic coast, with dunes and beautiful beaches. Small wonder that there is a direct high-speed train from Paris to Arcachon now.

The town itself consists of four subtowns: Summer Town, Spring Town, Autumn Town and Winter Town on the hills, where the villas are most striking. The chess-playing artists had their villas in Summer Town, near the sea.

The Dalis had arrived in 1939, Duchamp and Reynolds came in May 1940. Dali, in his *Secret Life*, made a bit of fun of Duchamp: 'After Coco [fashion designer Coco Chanel], Marcel Duchamp came to see us. He was terrified by the bombardments of Paris that had not yet taken place. Duchamp is an even more anti-historic being than I; he continued to give himself over to his marvelous and hermetic life, the contact with whose inactivity was for me a paroxysmal stimulant for my work.'

In fact, the bombardment of Paris of June 3, 1940 would take more than 250 lives, most of them civilians. And Dali, who originally had thought of the war as a children's street-corner scrap, came to his senses, as he was to write, 'when the big, happy and taciturn children of the German troops arrived in fairy-tale armoured carriages, I said to myself, this is getting too historical for me.' With his wife Gala he fled to his native Spain just before the border was closed.

Rest centre for the troops

Like Dali, Duchamp kept his cool. In a letter to his American friend Beatrice

Wood he wrote on July 17, 1940: ‘Life since the occupation has gotten organized. We have very little contact with the Germans. They’re mainly busy looking for petrol and taking it for their cars. Arcachon is a ‘rest’ centre for the troops. So I’ll be staying here until September, then going back to Paris.’ And also: ‘The month of August will hopefully be very pleasant here.’ And: ‘In any case, the “drama” is over.’ In fact, as we are painfully aware, most of the ‘drama’ of the occupation was still to come, but just as during the first World War, Duchamp managed to flee to the United States in time.

His letter to Beatrice Wood was written on paper of Café-Brasserie Aux Sports, chez Julien Moineau, 59 Boulevard d’Haussez, Arcachon. Julien Moineau was a famous cyclist, who, after his sporting victories, started running this café.

When I visited Arcachon this year, I made pictures of the villa Franck-Liane, where Duchamp had stayed. I talked to Liane, who is now 94 years old. I photographed the Casino, a mock-medieval folly where Duchamp probably spent some time, as he had a strange fascination with roulette systems, as witness his *Casino Bond 1* from 1924, which fetched more than a million dollars at an auction in 2010.

I photographed the Villa Salesse near the beach, the residence of the Dalis, and I talked to the present owner of the Villa St Georges, also known as the Villa Napoleon III, a gem of a seaside villa where Samuel Beckett stayed with his future wife.

But I couldn’t find Aux Sports, where I think Duchamp, Beckett and Alekhine met. Only later did I find out that not only the name of the establishment had been changed – it’s now the restaurant Chez Yvette – but also the name of the street, which is no longer Boulevard d’Haussez, but Boulevard du Général Leclerc. So I missed what should have been the highlight of my small collection of photographs from Arcachon. It’s always like that.

> ‘Oh! What a lovely war, with wine, hare, duck and oysters. One would almost envy the Dalis, on the run from the Germans.’

Congenial souls

Beckett knew Duchamp from Paris, where Mary Reynolds had kept court and created a meeting place of avant-garde artists. Beckett was an avid chess player. In 1938 he had already published the novel *Murphy*, which contains the moves of a quirky game between Murphy and Mr. Endon, a psychiatric patient. His theater play *Endgame* (1957) owes much to chess, and not only its title. Several art critics have suggested that the construction of the play is heavily influenced by Duchamp’s chess book *Opposition and Sister Squares are Reconciled* of 1932. True or not, what is certain is that Duchamp and Beckett had something in common that put a stamp on all their work: a great scepticism about the workings of language. Both were lovers of puns in which language runs riot. For both Duchamp and Beckett, language runs riot all the time and is completely unreliable as a tool for human communication.

Beckett, having played over several ‘best games’ collections, had chess erudition and was delighted to find chess partners in Arcachon. Of course, Duchamp was too strong for him, but Duchamp did not mind playing against weaker players.

According to the Duchamp scholars Jennifer Gouch-Cooper and Jacques Caumont, Duchamp was playing chess with Gala one day when their game was interrupted by Salvador, who stole a pawn for the picture he was working on. It was *Two Pieces of Bread Expressing the Sentiment of Love* (1940), on which the pawn can be seen.

Alekhine still with France

After the Olympiad in Buenos Aires in 1939, Alexander Alekhine had boarded a ship to Lisbon, where he would stay till early 1940. From there he and his wife went to Paris, where he was appointed an interpreter for the French army. At the time of the armistice between France and Germany on June 22, which was in fact the capitulation of France, he was with his army section in Arcachon.

In his Beckett biography *Damned to Fame* (2004), James Knowlson wrote: ‘So lengthy games of chess in a seafront café helped to while away the long, dreary days. Once when Duchamp and Beckett were playing chess together, Duchamp pointed out, to Beckett’s great excitement, that the world chess champion, Alexander Alekhine (a chess genius, according to Beckett), had just walked in.’

We are not told what happened next. Duchamp and Alekhine had been members of the same French team in three Olympiads, so they were well acquainted. Did Duchamp introduce Beckett to his hero? Probably not. It wasn’t his way, nor Beckett’s.

Anyway, there they were, the demigods of chess, art and literature, in a small café in a small seaside town. From here their ways would diverge widely. Alekhine would write his anti-Semitic articles about Jewish and Aryan chess. Beckett, though a citizen of neutral Ireland, would join the French Resistance and later said: ‘You couldn’t just stand there with your arms folded.’

In contrast, after arriving in the United States in 1915, Duchamp was quoted as saying: ‘I must say that I admire the attitude of combatting invasion with folded arms.’

This time, on May 14, 1942, he left France on a steamer to Casablanca, and from there found a ship to New York. His 13th Atlantic crossing he called ‘the best trip of all. It was perfectly delicious. All the lights were on and we had dancing on deck every night.’

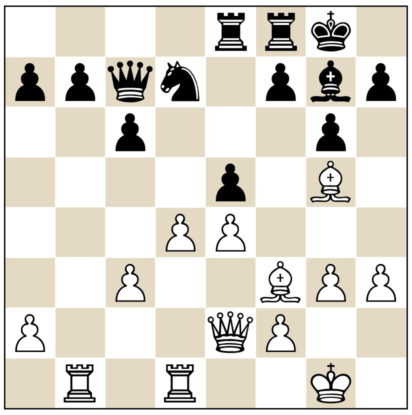
His mistress Mary Reynolds had returned to Paris, as she didn’t want to leave her cat alone. ■

The first time they played was in 1972, in Amsterdam. In total they would cross swords 71 times. **JAN TIMMAN** remembers Viktor Kortchnoi, the tireless fighter whose glorious career spanned an incredible 67 years.

Never-ending passion

Loek van Wely recently asked me which player I thought had the highest number of games in the database. Although I knew that I was high on the list myself, it didn't take me long to find the answer: Viktor Kortchnoi. 'Yes,' said Van Wely, 'and his record will probably never be broken'. He was a competitive player for 67 years, from 1945 to 2012, and including rapid and blitz games, the database contains more than 5000 of his games.

Kortchnoi was also involved in the fight for the world championship for several decades. Despite the 20-year difference between us, I played 71 games against him – a number only exceeded by my tally against Karpov and Ljubojevic. Our first game was in 1972 and it turned into a mad time-trouble scramble full of hyper-sharp strategical and tactical turns.



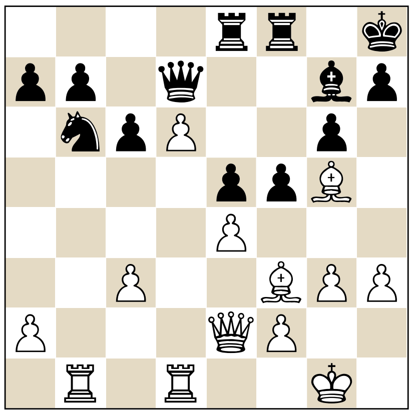
Kortchnoi-Timman
Amsterdam 1972
position after 18.♖ab1

The middlegame is slightly better for White.

18...f5 Sharp but not very good. As soon as the position is opened, the white bishop pair will be strong.

19.♕c4+ ♔h8 20.d5 ♘b6 21.d6!
This is Black's problem. The white d-pawn will get very strong.

21...♕d7 22.♕e2



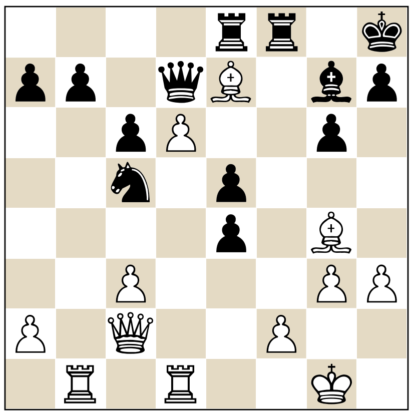
Although Kortchnoi was already 41 when this was played, he was not yet at the top of his game. The Kortchnoi of six years later would probably have gone for 22.♕b3!, when Black has no counterplay and is reduced to sitting by and watching how White reinforces his position.

22...♘a4!
I grab this chance to take my knight to better pastures with both hands.

23.♕c2 ♘c5 24.♗e7
The computer has a slight preference for a strategic move like 24.a4. Kortchnoi wants to set things straight immediately.

24...fxe4 Again as sharp as possible – a rather convoluted attempt to sacrifice an exchange. These days I would not have hesitated here. 24...♖xe7 25.dxe7 ♕xe7 would have been a far simpler way to sacrifice an exchange and keep a playable position.

25.♗g4



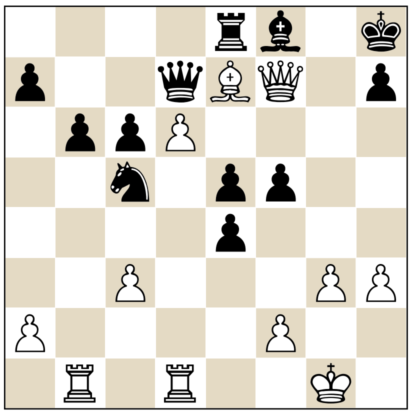
25...♖f5
This was the idea. If White takes the rook, Black will end up with a strong central pawn front. The drawback of Black's plan is that the white queen's bishop remains a thorn in his flesh.

26.♕e2 On its way to ... f7! **26...♗f8**
An understandable move. Black wants to force White to swap his mighty bishop.

27.♕c4 b6 28.♗xf5 gxf5 29.♕f7
The queen has penetrated. Now Black is facing a difficult choice.

EIRAWAN
OJ
14
J.V.D.WIEL
13
J.SUNIE
12
W.BROWN
11
G.LIGTE
10
GURJ
KOVACEV
URT

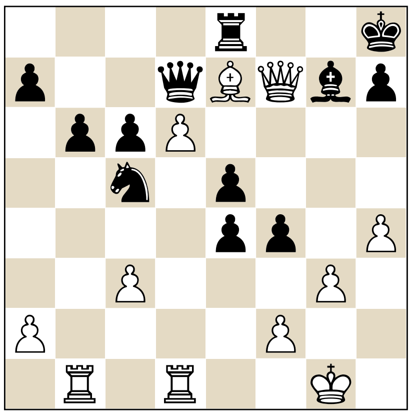
Jan Timman and Viktor Kortchnoi at the start of the 1980 Hoogovens tournament.



29...♗g7
I decided to let the e7-bishop live in order to maintain my pawn structure, hoping that White would not be able to effectively open the position by the time time-trouble struck. The computer prefers 29...♗xe7, and it's true that the situation after 30.dxe7 ♕xe7 31.♕xf5 ♖f8 is not entirely clear. Black has active play.

30.h4
The start of serious time-trouble. More prudent would have been 30.♔h2, with a large advantage.

30...f4
Of course. Black will get counterplay.



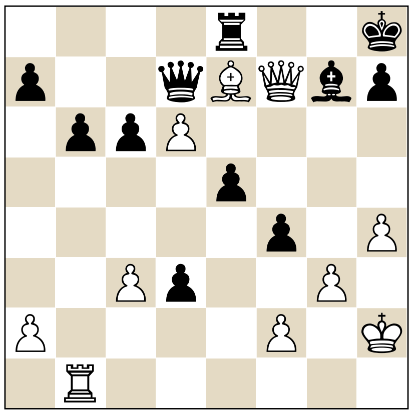
31.♔h2 In time-trouble it was hard to see that 31.g4! was the correct move, the point being that 31...♕xg4+ is impossible in view of 32.♔h2, and White wins. The g-file will be opened with decisive effect, which is why 31...e3 is Black's best reply. After 32.♕f5 exf2+ 33.♔xf2 ♔g8 Black can harbour good hopes of saving the game, since the closed character of the position will make it hard for White to break through.

31...♘d3
The computer indicates 31...♖f8 (or taking on g3 first) as the best move, the idea being 32.♕h5 fxg3+ 33.fxg3 ♖f2+ 34.♔g1 ♕h3!, and if White takes the rook, it will be perpetual check. But I stuck to my principle of continuing to play as sharply as possible. It's interesting to see that Black is attacking here, despite the highly dangerous white passed pawn that reduces the black queen to a passive blocking piece.

> 'Although Kortchnoi was already 41 when this was played, he was not yet at the top of his game.'

32.♖xd3
White returns the exchange with the idea of opening the g-file, but this plan fails for tactical reasons. Better was 32.♖d2.

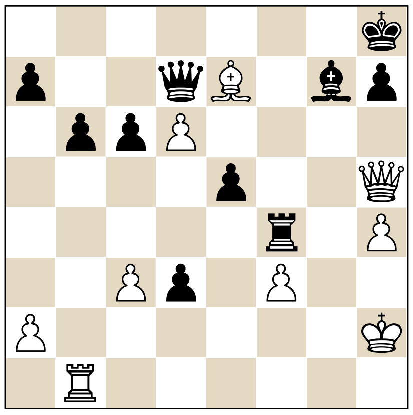
32...exd3



33.gxf4? Consistent but losing. White should have kept the position closed with 33.g4. After 33...e4 34.♕xf4 ♖xe7 35.dxe7 ♕xe7 36.♕b8+ ♗f8 the position is equal.

33...♖f8!
Kortchnoi must have missed this finesse. Black takes over the attack.

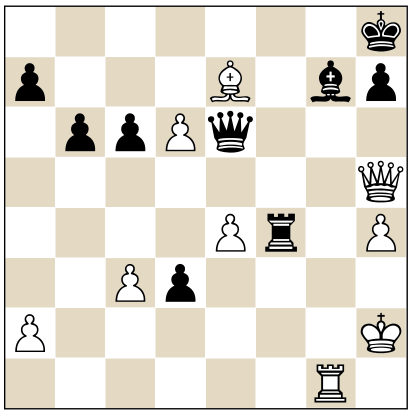
34.♕h5 ♖xf4 35.f3



35...e4! These kinds of moves came easily to me.

36.fxe4 ♕e6! Another hammer blow. The queen leaves its defensive position to lend the black attack decisive support. Black again has the finesse 37.♕e8+ ♖f8, and wins.

37.♖g1 White's best chance.

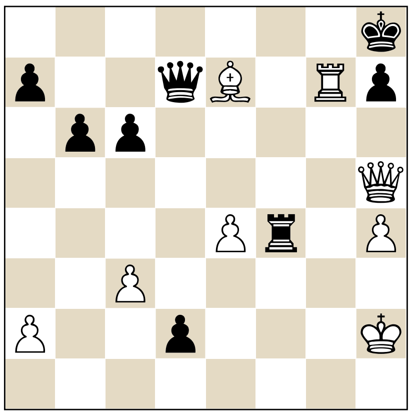


37...d2? Utter panic. I was briefly overwhelmed by the realization that, for the first time in my life, I had a chance to defeat a world-class player. The win was there for the taking: 37...♖f2+ 38.♔g3 ♖f7!, and White has no defence. 37...♕xe4 would have won as well in view of 38.♕e8+ ♖f8 39.d7 ♗e5+ 40.♖g3 ♕e2+ 41.♔h3 ♕f1+, and it is curtains.

38.d7?

With just a handful of seconds left on the clock, Kortchnoi shows that he has lost the thread as well. With 38.♖xg7! he could even have won. He must have missed that White had a mate on f8 after 38...♔xg7 39.♕g5+ ♕g6 40.♕xf4 d1♕. Now White is lost again.

38...♕xd7 39.♖xg7



39...♖f2+

The final mistake. With the simple 39...♔xg7 I could still have won. After 40.♕g5+ ♔f7 41.♕xf4+ ♔xe7 42.♕g5+ ♔e6 43.♕f5+ ♔d6 44.♕f4+ ♔c5! the d-pawn will decide.

40.♔g3 ♔xg7 41.♔xf2 ♕xe7 42.♕g4+ ♔f7 43.♔e2 ♕e6 44.♕f4+ ♔e7 45.♕c7+ ♕d7 46.♕e5+ ♕e6

And drawn at Kortchnoi's suggestion.

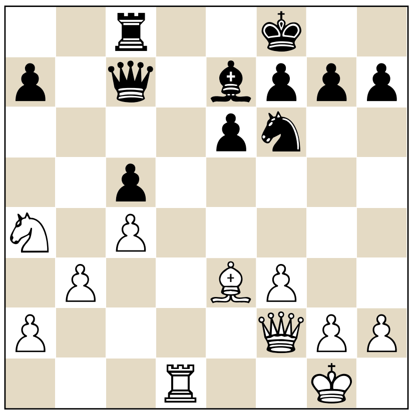
> ‘He was always genuinely interested in the finesses and secret resources of the position and certainly not devoid of self-criticism.’

In a reaction to his death, Nigel Short called Kortchnoi ‘a cantankerous old git’ on Twitter, and it's true that Kortchnoi had a habit of regaling his opponent with the most bizarre insults during a post-mortem. But our post-mortem of 44 years ago was utterly different! Kortchnoi was courtesy personified and instead regaled me with instructive suggestions. At some point he suggested a sharp move for Black saying: ‘Why didn't you play this? That's your style!’ In later years, too, analysing together with him was often an interesting experience. He was always genuinely interested in the finesses and secret resources of the position and certainly not devoid of self-criticism. And he was invariably interested when I showed him endgame studies.

Making up for lost time

I have already said that Kortchnoi only reached his peak when he was well into his 40s. This made him different from his peers. Tal shot to the top like a comet, whereas Spassky was known for his gradual rise to the world championship. Kortchnoi was five years older than these two players, and when he made it to challenger for the first time, those two World Champions had long been over the hill. It looked as if he was making up for lost time: Tal, Petrosian and Spassky might have a greater natural ability, but Kortchnoi was determined to prove that hard work could also lead to superb results. Karpov must also have underestimated him, as he implicitly admits in *Karpov on Karpov*: after beating Spassky in the 1974 semi-final he geared his preparation towards a match against Fischer because, he thought, Kortchnoi shouldn't present much of a hurdle.

That match against Fischer never materialized; for seven years, Karpov would only play Kortchnoi for the highest honour, playing a total of 104 games against him. Although their eventual score clearly favoured Karpov, this was very different after their first two matches: in 55 games, Karpov only managed a +2 score. This was partly due to Kortchnoi's incredible resilience. He managed to stage a late comeback in both matches. Despite being Karpov's senior by 20 years, he surpassed him in energy. This was particularly clear in Baguio 1978, where Kortchnoi transformed a 5-2 deficit into a 5-5 tie. In three long games he managed to technically outclass Karpov. I was especially impressed by their 29th match game.



Kortchnoi-Karpov
Baguio 1978, 29th match game
position after 25...♕c7

White has a slight plus, but it doesn't count for much.

26.♕g3

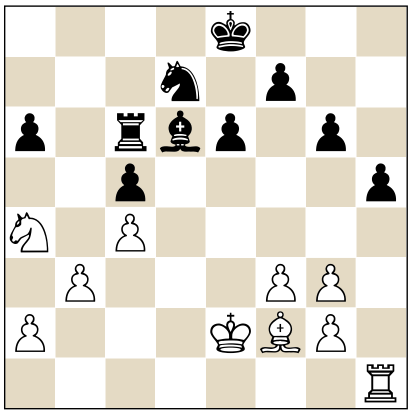
In seven years Viktor Kortchnoi and Anatoly Karpov played 104 games for the world title. The ultimate score clearly favoured Karpov, but in the first two matches (55 games) he did only marginally better (+2).

A remarkable decision. Kortchnoi is aiming for a queen swap, relying on his technical ability and not caring about the doubled pawns.

26...♕xg3 27.hxg3 h5

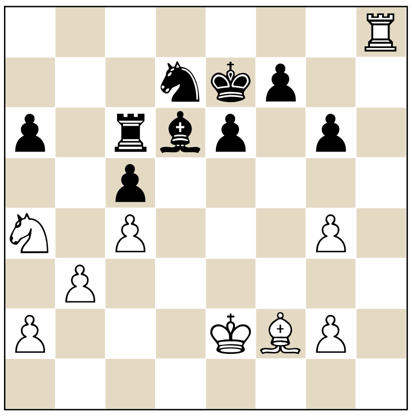
A good strategic move. Black stops the foremost g-pawn from advancing.

28.♔f2 ♔e8 29.♔e2 g6 30.♘c3 a6 31.♘a4 ♖c6 32.♖h1 ♗d6 33.♗f2 ♘d7



34.g4 An amazing move. White accepts isolated doubled pawns in order to increase the range of his rook. The computer agrees with this idea, despite continuing to assess White's plus as marginal.

34...hxg4 35.♖h8+ ♔e7 36.fxg4



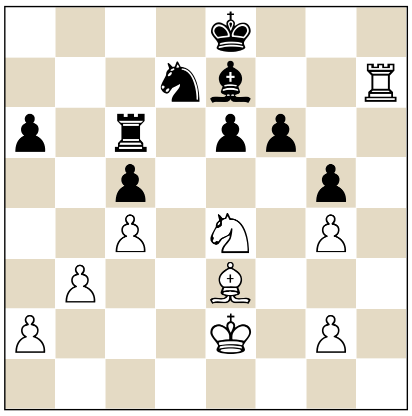
36...g5

A vintage Karpov pawn move, fixing the foremost white g-pawn in order to be able to target it later. He must have had winning ambitions at this point, but this was wildly optimistic. As I indicated in my Dutch-language matchbook at the time, 36...♗e5 would have been stronger.

37.♗e3

This is the problem. Black is forced to weaken his seventh rank, giving the white rook more options.

37...f6 38.♘c3 ♔f7 39.♖h7+ ♔e8 40.♘e4 ♗e7

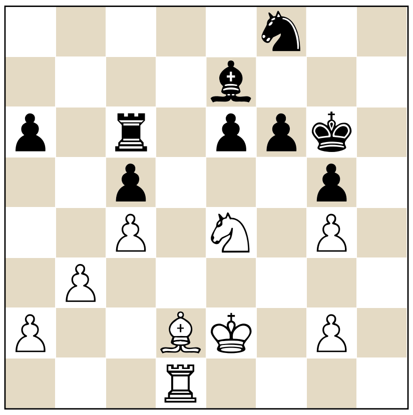


41.♖h6 The sealed move, which had taken Kortchnoi no fewer than 37 minutes, so that he was left with only 23 minutes for the next 15 moves. In *The Inside Story of the Match*, Raymond Keene writes that Harry Golombek won four bottles of whisky by having guessed the move right. Those good old days! It was not the best move, incidentally. As Larsen – in his match book – and Keene indicated, 41.♗d2! would have yielded White good winning chances.

41...♔f7 42.♖h7+ ♔f8 43.♖h8+ ♔f7 44.♗d2 ♘f8 45.♖h1

Changing tack. Now that Black has protected the h-file, Kortchnoi is going to transfer his rook to the d-file.

45...♔g6 46.♖d1



YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS! THE CHESS CLUB IS CLOSED ON SUNDAYS !?!?
WELCOME VIKTOR KORTCHNOI!
VONK

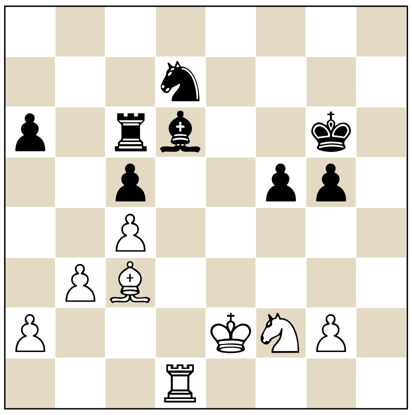
BEREND VONK

46...f5

Most commentators – including myself – gave this move a '?'. Only Pachman let it pass without comment. This was a wise decision, because there's nothing wrong with it. On the contrary; the computer regards it as the most accurate move to maintain the balance.

47.♘f2 ♗d6 But this is wrong. The correct plan was 47...♖d6!, intending to swap rooks. 47...♗f6 would also have been better than the text.

48.♗c3 ♘d7 49.gxf5+ exf5



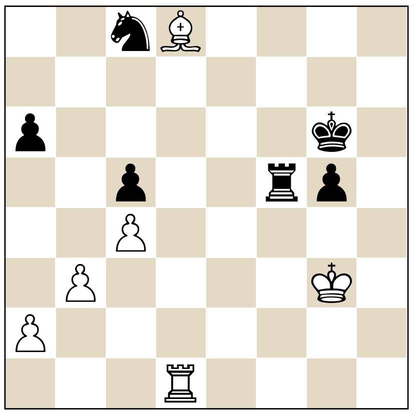
50.g4!

Strongly played. White wants to get more squares for his knight. It is interesting to see Kortchnoi's lack of worry about his steadily dwindling material. He is continuing to play for a win, always gunning for the weak black queenside pawns. If he manages to capture one of those pawns, he won't need any kingside pawns.

50...♘b6

Larsen called this 'a very ugly move', and it's true that the knight is not ideally placed on b6; but Black had to keep the white rook away from d5.

51.♔f3 ♗e7 52.♗a5 ♖f6 53.♔g2 fxg4 54.♘xg4 ♖e6 55.♔f3 ♗f6 56.♘xf6 ♖xf6+ 57.♔g4 ♘c8 58.♗d8 ♖f4+ 59.♔g3 ♖f5



60.a4 White finally launches an offensive on the queenside.

60...♔f7 61.♖d3 ♖e5 62.♔g4 ♔g6 63.a5 ♖e4+ 64.♔f3 ♖f4+

This was called the decisive error at the time – another incorrect assess-

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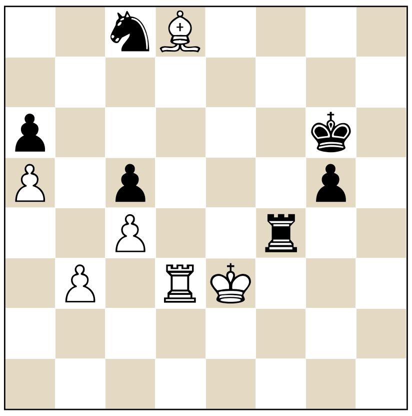
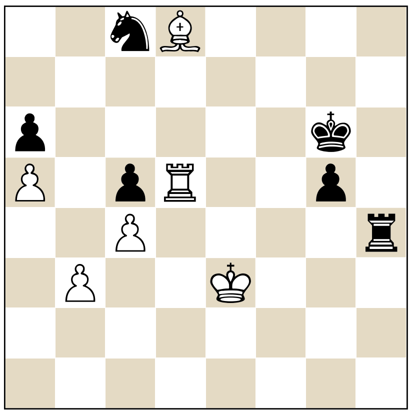
ment, since it's the computer's first choice.

65.♔e3



65...♖h4? Now Karpov really makes his decisive mistake. He is going to capture the white b-pawn via a series of checks on the h-file, except that this pawn turns out to be of no consequence and the black rook should have stuck to its defensive job. The correct defence was 65...♖f8, e.g. 66.♖d5 ♖e8+ 67.♔f3 ♖f8+ 68.♔g3 ♖f5, and White will find it hard to make progress.

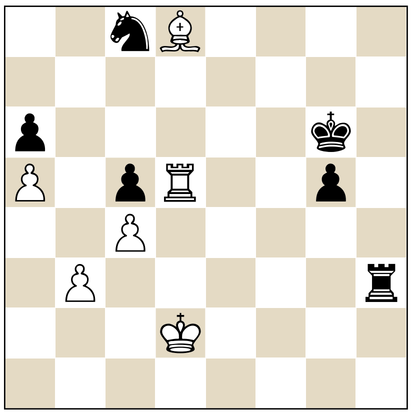
66.♖d5!



Now the c-pawn will fall.

66...♖h3+ 67.♔d2

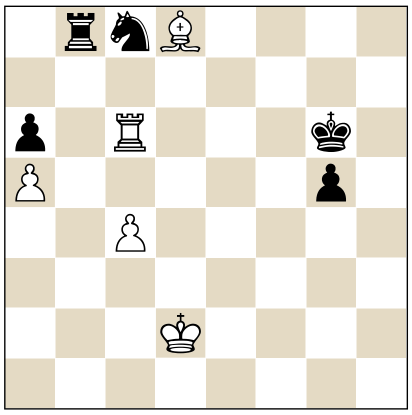
An inaccuracy that Karpov fails to exploit. Correct was 67.♔e2, to prevent a later knight check on e4.



67...♖xb3

Karpov has really had it here. If he had still been fresh, he would surely have found 67...♔f7!, intending to meet 68.♖xc5 with 68...♘d6, when a check on e4 would have saved him.

68.♖xc5 ♖b8 69.♖c6+



After this it's all plain sailing for White. He captures the a-pawn, and then his passed pawns will decide.

69...♔f5 70.♖xa6 g4 71.♖f6+ ♔e4 72.♗c7 ♖b2+ 73.♔c3 ♖b7 74.♗h2 ♖h7 75.♗b8 ♖b7 76.♗g3 ♖b1 77.♖f4+ ♔e3 78.♖f8 ♘e7 79.a6

Black resigned.

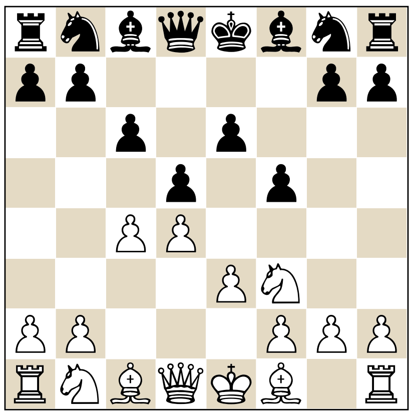
By winning his next white game as well, Kortchnoi equalized the score, coming closer to the world title than ever before. Keene: 'After the game Kortchnoi declared that the chances in the match were now equal and that the result was a lottery. To observers, however, it appeared to be a lottery in which Kortchnoi held most of the tickets'. Kortchnoi now found himself in an awkward psychological bind. As the underdog, he had done extremely well: single-handedly taking on the mighty Soviet empire with the backing of only a handful of gurus and Englishmen. Now he suddenly was the favourite, a sea change that the younger player proved himself better able to adjust to. This was Karpov's forte, just as it is Carlsen's today. Karpov convincingly won Game 32, putting an end to Kortchnoi's dream. He had proved a lot, however: in four years' time he had risen to close to Karpov's level, justifying the proposition that Kortchnoi was the strongest player never to become World Champion.

Forever eager to learn

In the third match, three years later in Merano, Kortchnoi didn't stand a chance. Having turned 50 in the intervening years, he had lost his youthful energy. But he was by no means finished as a top player. He continued to play Candidates' matches for another decade. Even after turning 60 and beyond he remained a chess fanatic, continuously endeavouring to improve his play. I remember a conversation with Jussupow during Ubeda 1997. Jussupow had just drawn with Kortchnoi in a Nimzo-Indian game. During the post-mortem, Kortchnoi had shaken his head saying: 'I don't understand this variation well enough. I will have to spend a lot of time studying it.' Jussupow was impressed: a player of well over 60 and still so eager to learn. This eagerness bore fruit. At 70 years of age, Kortchnoi won the strongly contested annual Biel tournament ahead of Gelfand and Svidler. On his way to victory he defeated a very young Grischuk in impressive fashion.

SL 1.3 – B30
Viktor Kortchnoi
Alexander Grischuk
Biel 2001

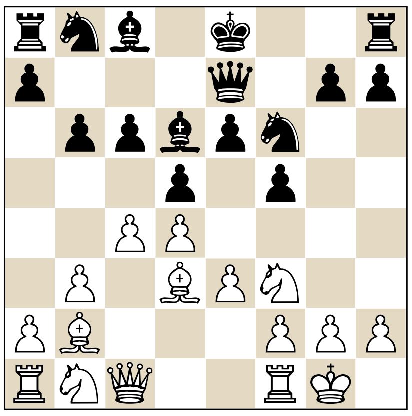
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c6 4.e3 f5



There is nothing wrong with this move per se. Black is going for the Stonewall in acceptable circum-

stances. But it wasn't a wise choice against Kortchnoi, who was uniquely capable of exploiting strategic shortcomings in certain defensive systems, as well as a past master at dismantling the King's Indian.

5.♗d3 ♘f6 6.0-0 ♗d6 7.b3 ♕e7 8.♗b2 b6 9.♕c1

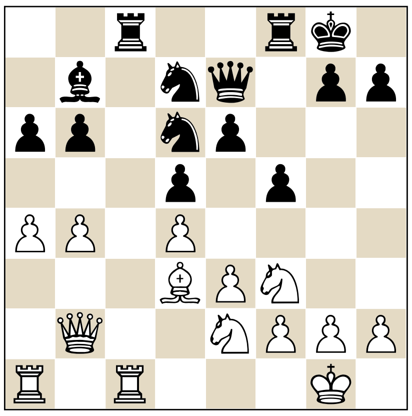


Aiming for a strategically advantageous swap of the queen's bishop.

9...♗b7 10.♗a3 ♘bd7 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.♗xd6 ♕xd6 13.♘c3 a6 14.♕b2 0-0 15.b4 ♖ac8

Playing the other rook to c8 would probably have been more accurate.

16.a4 ♘e4 17.♘e2 ♕e7 18.♖fc1 ♘d6



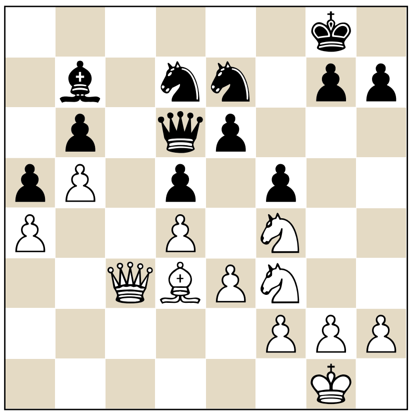
19.b5! An instructive moment. White fixes the structure on the colour of his own bishop in order to gain as much space as possible, control of square c6 being of particular importance. Now it also becomes clear why Black would have been better off keeping his queen's rook on a8, since this would have enabled him to swap on b5.

19...a5 20.♕a3 ♖xc1+ 21.♖xc1 ♖c8 22.♖xc8+ ♘xc8 23.♕c3

It is not yet time to swap the queens.

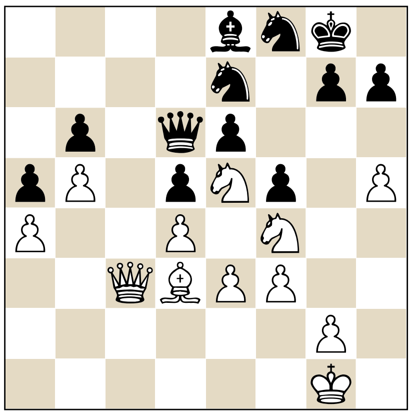
23...♕d6 24.♘f4 ♘e7

'A strangling game that Capablanca and Karpov in their prime would have been proud of.'

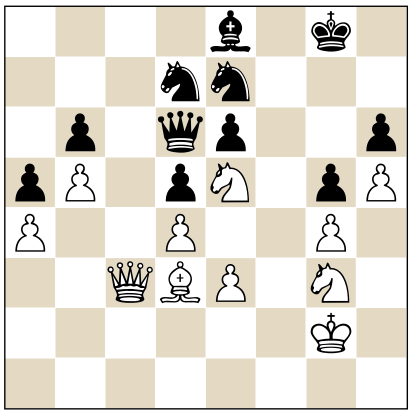


25.h4 Having fixed the queenside structure to his advantage, Kortchnoi starts expanding on the kingside.

25...♘f8 26.h5 ♗c8 27.♘e5 ♗d7 28.f3 ♗e8



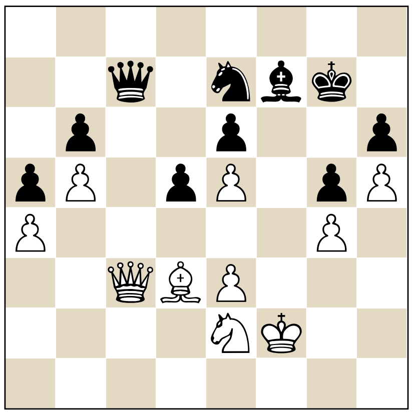
29.g4! Hemming his opponent in even further. **29...g5 30.♘e2 ♘d7 31.♔g2 h6 32.♘g3 fxg4 33.fxg4**



33...♘xe5

Black was already in big trouble, but now the position becomes ultimately losing in view of the fact that the e7-knight will no longer be able to find a good square. Both Black's minor pieces have been reduced to mere lookers-on.

34.dxe5 ♕c5 35.♕d2 ♕c7 36.♕b2 ♔g7 37.♘e2 ♔g8 38.♔f2 ♗f7 39.♕d4 ♔g7 40.♕c3

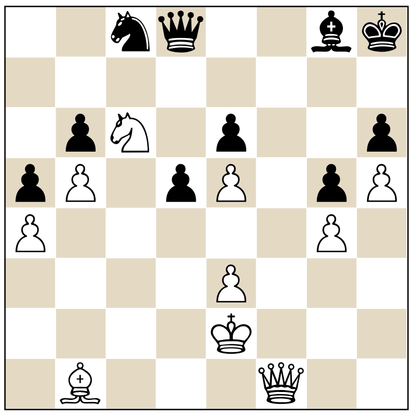


Now Kortchnoi is finally prepared to swap the queens, since it will leave his minor pieces in absolute control.

40...♕b8 41.♘d4 ♕d8

Remarkably enough, the computer assesses the position after the better defence of 41...♔f8 as only slightly better for White. It obviously has trouble recognizing how powerless Black's minor pieces really are.

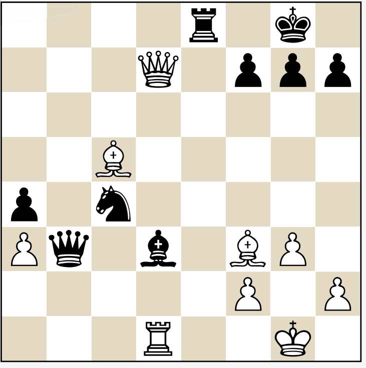
42.♔e2 ♗g8 43.♗b1 ♔h8 44.♕a3 ♘c8 45.♗g6 ♔g7 46.♗b1 ♔h8 47.♕c1 ♘e7 48.♕f1 ♘c8 49.♘c6



Black resigned. A strangling game that Capablanca and Karpov in their prime would have been proud of. ■

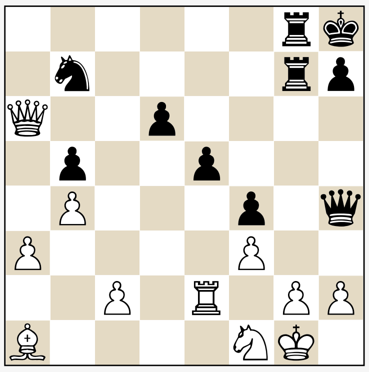
from page 95

MAXIMize your Tactics Solutions



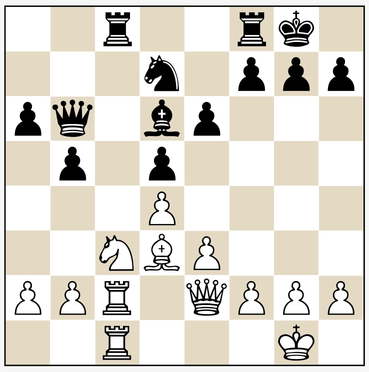
1. So-Carlsen
Paris (blitz) 2016

28...♕xd1+! White resigned in view of 29.♗xd1 ♖e1+ 30.♔g2 ♗f1+ 31.♔f3 ♘e5+. The players' names compensate for simplicity of the combination.



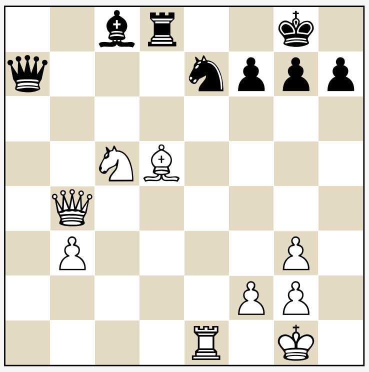
2. Isgandarova-Bodnaruk
Mamaia 2016

40...♕h3 is parried by 41.♘g3. Black crashed through with the 'indirect' **40...♕e1!** White resigned.



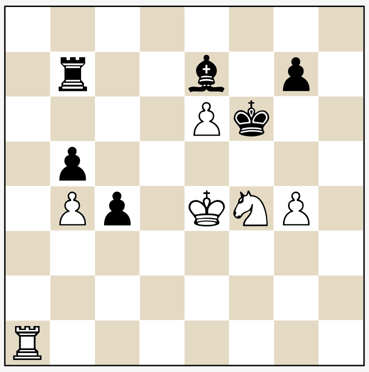
3. Adhiban-Dzhumaev
Abu Dhabi 2016

20.♘xd5! ♖xc2? 20...♕b8 was the lesser evil. **21.♗xh7+!** Black resigned, as 21...♔h8 22.♗xc2 ♗xh2+ 23.♔xh2 exd5 24.♕h5+ ♕h6 25.♕xh6+ loses.



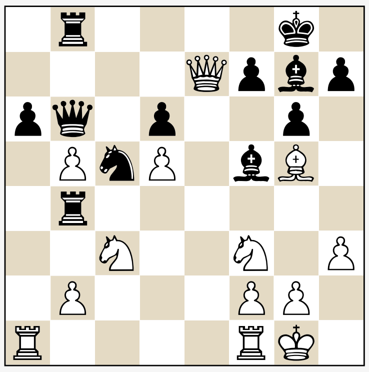
4. Onischuk-Olund
Stockholm 2016

28.♘b7! shows the weakness of the back rank. Black resigned: 28...♗xb7 29.♕xe7 loses a piece, after 28...♖xd5 29.♕xe7 h6 30.♕e8+ ♔h7 31.♕xc8 the bishop is lost; the key line goes 28...♘xd5 29.♘xd8 ♘xb4 30.♖e8 mate.



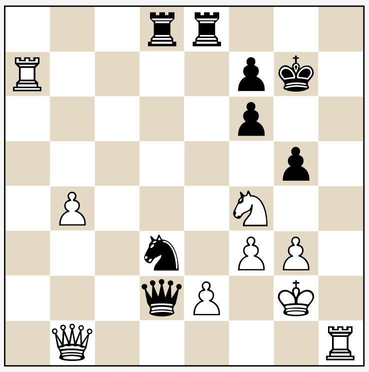
5. Wojtaszek-Ter-Sahakyan
Gjakova 2016

47.g5+! ♔xg5 48.♖g1+ ♔h6 If 48...♔f6 49.♖g6 mate; 48...♔h4 49.♔f3! ♗d6 50.♖g4+ mating. **49.♘g6!** The king protects the knight, and the rook performs the execution: 49...♔h7 50.♔f5 ♔g8 51.♖h1. Black resigned.



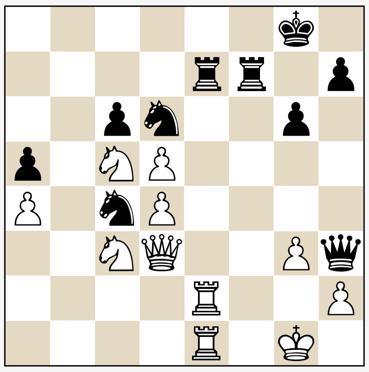
6. Taboas-Almagro
Madrid 2012

21...♗xc3! 22.bxc3 ♖e4 23.♕f6 ♘d7 The queen has no place to run to, but White tries to counterattack. **24.♖xa6 ♕xb5** When it rains, it pours. White resigned as 25.♕xd6 is met by 25...♕xf1+! 26.♔xf1 ♖b1+.



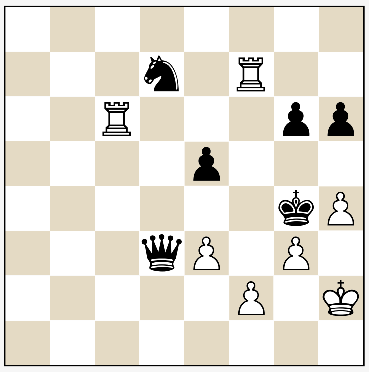
7. Abramovic-Markovic
Vrnjacka Banja 2012

Special measures are needed. **43.♖xf7+! ♔g8** 43...♔xf7 44.♕b3+ is the same. **44.♖h8+! ♔xf7** 44...♔xh8 45.♕h1+ ♔g8 46.♕h7 mate. **45.♕b3+ ♔g7 46.♖h7+!** Black resigned; he is checkmated after 46...♔xh7 47.♕f7+ ♔h8 48.♘g6 or 47...♔h6 48.♕g6.



8. Moroni-Parligras
Gjakova 2016

29...♖f2! A stunning move. **30.♖xf2** 30.♔xf2 ♕xh2+ 31.♔f3 ♖f7+ 32.♔g4 ♕h5 mate. **30...♖xe1+ 31.♖f1 ♘e3!** White resigned. If 32.♖xe1 ♕g2 mate. The only line where he isn't checkmated on the spot, 32.♔f2 ♖xf1+ 33.♔xe3 ♕g2, doesn't inspire either.



9. Stocek-Tunik
Golden Sands 2012

White played 52.♖c7 ♘b6 and even lost in the end. He missed a fabulous opportunity: **52.♖d6! ♕xd6 53.f3+ ♔h5 54.♔h3! g5 55.♖g7!** when the black king perishes at the hands of the g4-pawn.

Just Checking

Timur Gareyev

(aka Blindfold King)

CURRENT ELO: **2611**

DATE OF BIRTH: **March 3, 1988**

PLACE OF BIRTH: **Tashkent, Uzbekistan**

PLACE OF RESIDENCE: **Kansas City, United States**

LENNART OOTES

What is your favourite colour?
Blue.

What kind of food makes you happy?
Bell peppers.

And what drink?
Lemon water is good for your energy and health.

Who is your favourite author?
Dan Brodsky-Chanfeld, World Champion Skydiver and the leading skydive coach.

What is the best book you ever read?
From the books I am reading now, *How Life Imitates Chess* by Garry Kasparov.

What is your all-time favourite movie?
Dumb and Dumber To.

What is your favourite TV series?
Friends.

Do you have a favourite actor?
Jim Carrey.

And a favourite actress?
Natalie Portman.

What music do you like to listen to?
N.W.A.

Do you have a favourite painter?
I definitely admire Salvador Dali.

What is your best result ever?
Having been born and having stayed alive!

What was the best game you ever played?
Gareyev-Zapata at G-Tech Atlanta, Georgia 2016.

Who is your favourite chess player?
My coach Georgy Konstantinovich Borisenko.

Is there a chess book that had a profound influence on you?
Strategy & Tactics by Soviet Master Lisitsin taught me the level of art and science I must strive for in my chess.

What is the best chess country in the world?
Jamaica.

What are chess players particularly good at (except for chess)?
Singing and poetry.

Do chess players have typical shortcomings?
They derive creative energy from an intellectual and emotional pursuit. We must focus consciously to get better at practical lifestyle decisions in everyday life.

What is it that you dislike in a person?
'Helpless hope'.

Do you have any superstitions?
That taking my queen out too early may lead to a crazy game.

Which three people would you like to invite for dinner?
Steven Colbert, Vladimir Putin and Queen Elizabeth.

What is the best piece of advice you were ever given?
Live the goodness of love!

Is there something you'd love to learn?
Mushroom picking.

Where is your favourite place in the world?
The Napali Coast of Kauai.

What is your greatest fear?
(And greatest fascination) Swimming in the deep seas of the Indian Ocean.

What would you save from your house if it were on fire?
A plate of freshly sautéed eggplant.

How do you relax?
Walking.

If you could change one thing in the chess world, what would it be?
I would encourage myself and people around me to do yoga every day.

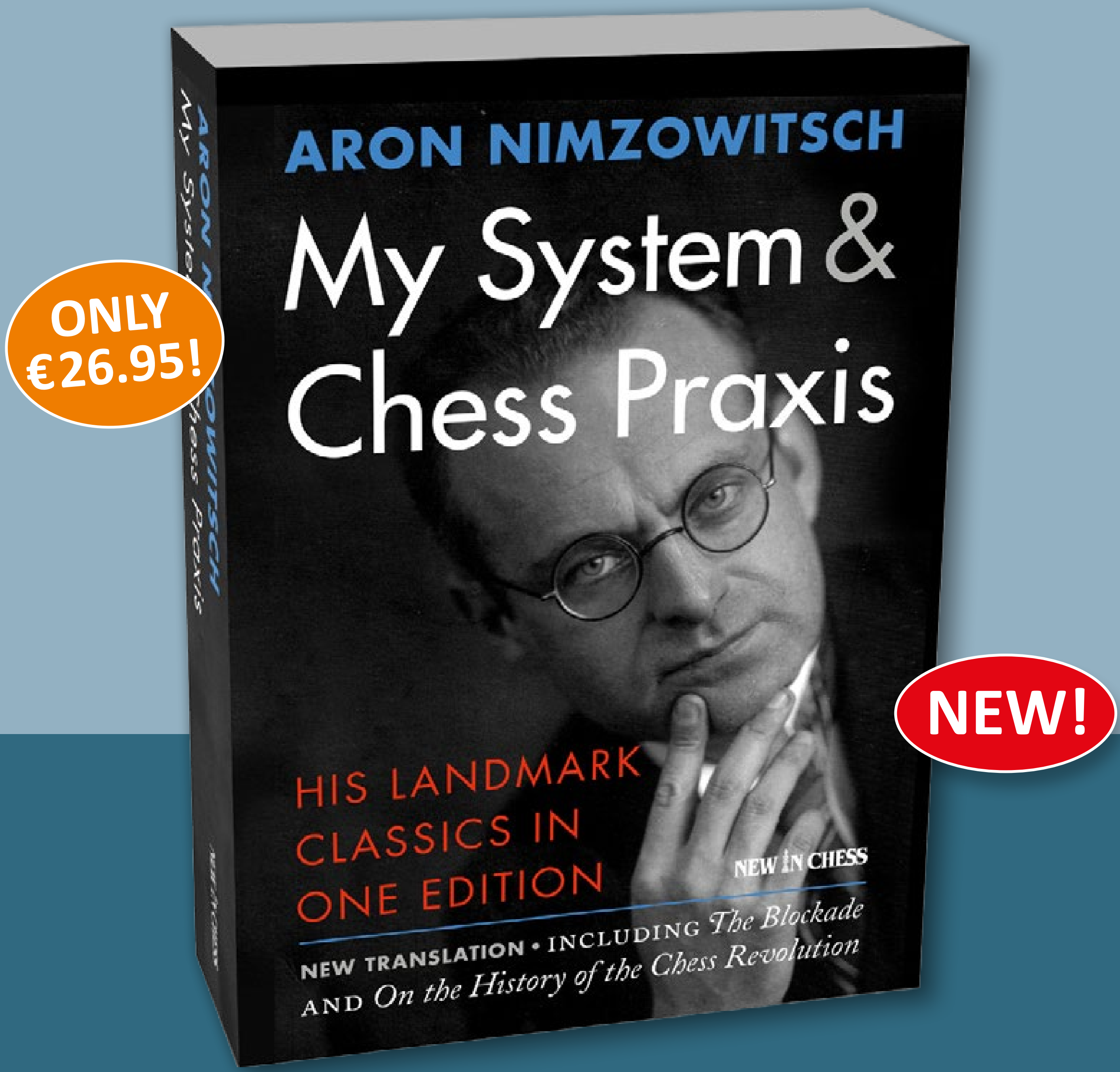
What is the stupidest rule in chess?
Checkmate. I don't understand why the bare king must get mated every time. Once in a while the king should be able to checkmate the opponent's queen or knight.

What will be the nationality of the 2050 chess world champion?
North-Korean.

Is a knowledge of chess useful in everyday life?
In decision making and pattern recognition.

What is the best thing that was ever said about chess?
'Chess is like an ocean of fire. You either swim and embrace the turbulent waters, or else you get shackled in the arms of passive anticipation. Listen to the music of Caissa, the goddess of chess, timing is everything.'

Finally the English translation he deserved!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